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THE MOON
OF THE
FOURTEENTH NIGHT

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

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Frontispiece

THE MOON
OF THE
FOURTEENTH NIGHT

BEING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF
AN UNMARRIED DIPLOMAT IN PERSIA
DURING THE REVOLUTION

MADE INTO A BOOK BY
EUSTACHE DE LOREY
AND
DOUGLAS SLADEN
JOINT AUTHORS OF
"QUEER THINGS ABOUT PERSIA"

WITH 38 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM OLD PERSIAN PRINTS
PERSIAN NEWSPAPERS OF THE REVOLUTION
TIME, AND PHOTOGRAPHS

LONDON
HURST & BLACKETT, LTD.
PATERNOSTER HOUSE
1910

THE ILLUSTRATIONS ARE OF THREE CLASSES

1. Reproductions of photographs of persons and places mentioned in Valmont's journal.

2. Reproductions of pictures in contemporary Persian newspapers which were found with his journal.

3. Reproductions of the prints in a valuable old Persian book belonging to Mr. de Lorey. Similar prints illustrating Japanese books have been reproduced in England times without number. But this is the first time that Persian prints of this character have been presented to the British reader.

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PREFACE

THE public may remember that I collaborated with Eustache de Lorey in *Queer Things About Persia.*

When he told me of the journal of the late Edouard Valmont, his colleague who was in Teheran during the Persian Revolution, which had come into his hands, I said, " Let's make a book of it. If I am not mistaken the public will read it with the same relish as Pierre Loti's wonderful *Madame Chrysanthème.*

The Journal, in truth, presents much the same effects as those, with which M. Loti achieved his triumph. We have a young French bachelor, a man of birth and official position, eager for the novelty and excitement of life in the native style, falling into a liaison with a native woman. Valmont's notes are full of the atmosphere and incidents of this strange life.

An adventure, by an unbeliever, with a Mohammedan woman in Persia had the added zest of discovery meaning almost certain death for both parties, and of being almost without a parallel, since the bare idea of it is repulsive and almost inconceivable to a Persian woman. As we are giving the Confessions (never meant to meet the public eye) of this French boy aristocrat, we have taken every advantage of my collaborateur being a Frenchman to give the English in which the book is written a French accent and atmosphere, in the endeavour to retain the *naïveté* with which poor Edouard Valmont wrote down the diary of his brief romance.

It makes a very pretty idyll, his account of his life

à la Perse with the beautiful Bibi Mâh in the decayed old mansion, waited on by the faithful Mansur he had brought from Tunis,—whose Sunnite Mohammedanism, heretical in Persian eyes, prevented him from betraying the situation to the accursed Shiites,—and the Abyssinian Sunnite wife whom Mansur had found in Persia.

But many people will find the scraps of Legation life quite as interesting—exile brings the French very close together—the fair representative of Paquin, who was storming the harems of Teheran, plays a more important part in these pages than the representative of the Republic itself. Like Valmont, she belonged to a noble family of straitened means in Normandy. Of the high diplomatic value of the Journal I shall speak below.

But while Valmont was sunning himself in the smiles of Yvonne de Basqueville and Bibi Mâh, he suddenly found himself confronted with stupendous events, which from time to time obliterate domestic picturesquities from his diary. The ancient autocracy of Persia, which had survived conquest by Alexander the Great, and still claimed the license of Darius and Artaxerxes, was sapped by the wave of progress, which had swept over Asia since Japan set back the hands of the clock.

Autocracy dies hard ; it has ever its faithful bayonets, and it burns much powder in its panic. The effeminate Persian would have bowed before the janissaries of the Shah, but the brave and hardy Baktiyari of the mountains, who have been waiting for centuries to throw off the yoke of Persia, identified their national aspirations with the cause of the Constitution ; and Russia, who a few years earlier would have stepped in with her Cossacks to stamp out the Revolution, was now the faithful ally of England, pledged to a policy of non-interference, except for the prevention of massacres.

So the Revolution with its miserable episodes—empty

vapourings when both sides were well matched—massacres when either was in overwhelming force—with its pretentious proclamations, its destruction of property, its train of starvation, its religious lightnings and thunderings, is for ever breaking into the philanderings of Valmont in that Eastern Garden.

The reminiscences end abruptly for two reasons. When Valmont found his great happiness, those which have been preserved dwindle to meagre dimensions. But it is possible that there were others lost in the confusion of his assassination.

The reader will, I hope, excuse me if I point out how much of real political value is included in these gossiping reminiscences of Edouard Valmont. I think he must have meant to make a book of them himself, and I think he must have felt lonely at heart, because he gave so much time to his journal.

I might instance his picture of the death of Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah sitting up in his arm-chair in the Hall of Diamonds—surrounded by his heir and his brothers and his English doctor and the chief officials and mullas. Even more unique than the curious ceremonies, which followed his death, are those of the coronation of his successor, Mohammed Ali Shah, whose brief reign all falls into the compass of this book. I have read nothing like this description anywhere ; only a man who spoke Persian and was intimate with Persian Court life could have given us this Persian Coronation-service as he has. This alone would serve to show that the reminiscences are not mere Legation gossip, but the thoughtful expression of what a diplomat saw in Persia, during one of the most trying and remarkable periods in the history of the country.

One of the reasons why I think that Valmont contemplated the publication of a book, is his habit of introducing

personages, whom Mr. de Lorey tells me did not exist, but who were obviously founded on the model of personages of the greatest rank and influence, and would be recognised by a diplomat. Isfandiar is one of them, so are Baghir Khan and Mulla Ibrahim.

Valmont's reminiscences are freely interlarded with translations from native newspapers, with the date and source always given, which adds much to their value. A good many of them are introduced into this book to show native Persian opinion upon the various phases of the Revolution, which naturally forms its backbone more than Valmont's pictures of the two romances which influenced his life in Persia, and the quaint details of his life *à la Perse.*

There must be many readers only moderately interested in the alarms and massacres, the thirst for liberty, the groping in the dark for the fabric of a Constitution, the sea of words, now sullen now stormy, which enveloped the Persian Revolution. They will perhaps be fascinated, as I was, with the extraordinarily vivid but delicate way in which Valmont presents such an unfamiliar subject as the secret life of a foreigner tasting the forbidden fruit of the harem. It was this which made me believe that in these reminiscences we had found something to interest British readers about Persia as *Madame Chrysanthème* interested them about Japan.

But before I say more about this fascinating subject I must draw attention to the extraordinary account of a political sermon preached by the mulla whom Valmont calls Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din, which shows, more than anything else in the book, the trend of thought and spread of education among the Persian Constitutionalists. This struck me as more interesting than anything that I had read about the Bâbi movement in Persia.

It will be seen that Valmont believed thoroughly in the

honesty, and enlightened policy, of England in Persia; that he believed almost as much perhaps in the solidarity of the British and Russian *entente* in Persia; and that he regarded Russia as having been converted from a very mischievous policy in Persia by her understanding with England.

It is obvious that Valmont did not believe so entirely in the Persian comprehension of a Constitution; his remarks upon the discussion of the Budget in the Persian Majlis show that he considered the Persians rather hopeless in such matters as Constitutional Finance; and that was before the day when Budgets had become a bye-word and Constitutional Finance was becoming a lost art.

He is rather merciless in his descriptions of the two *coups d'état*. The impression I have is one of neither side being inclined to do any fighting, when it means real fighting; and of the Shah always meaning to break his word if he gets the chance. Once he thinks he has the chance when he seizes the persons of the Prime Minister and other members of a deputation of the Majlis. He throws them into chains, he means to execute them. But a faithful servant takes word to the British Legation, whose Oriental Secretary gallops over in *mufti*, armed only with a riding switch. The Shah " makes face ", by taking no notice of his arrival for quarter of an hour, and then surrenders the Premier, who retires with the British Secretary, and makes his way out of the country in perfect safety, escorted only by two guards of the British Legation.

Valmont's Journal abounds with incidents like this, and also with some which show the reverse side of the shield, where the armed mob of reactionaries get hold of a straggler of the Reform Party (with no *Deus ex machinâ* from the British Legation to interfere), and tear him to pieces. In its pages we see a revolution of the unwarlike with no great readiness to fight, but a good deal of the spirit of the martyr, and a sincere desire to act up to their ideals.

Valmont's Journal is a most illuminating commentary on the accounts of the revolution which have appeared in our own newspapers. Here we have Shah Mohammed Ali hating the Constitution he has been forced to accept, eternally intriguing against it, ready to break any oath; and the Reformers suffering all things, enduring all things, like the Italians in the days when they were conspiring for liberty against the Austrians, with apparently no hope of anything to crown their efforts except martyrdom. Chance gives us a glimpse of the fighting round Tabriz, which was the beginning of the end. Valmont after escorting one of the ladies of the Legation to the Caspian, was at Tabriz in those last days; and we were able to draw on his Journal for an unvarnished picture of the not very sensational campaign.

In the days before all these excursions and alarums, his Journal is full of fascinating descriptions of his amusements. Now it is an Omar-Khayyam picnic in the delightful gardens of the member of the Imperial Family, whom he veils under the name of Prince Harun-ar-Rashid. Here we get the Persian view of Omar which is so different to the English, even among Persians sufficiently cultivated to know the high estimation in which Omar is held in the West. There are many allusions to Valmont's own Persian garden. Persia gave us our word *Paradise* from her gardens. To me no pages of his Journal had the same attraction as those which described his life with the Persian girl, Bibi Mâh. I can picture to myself their first stolen meetings on the terrace, the romantic flight which nearly cost her her life, the days they spent together in the guest chamber of that old mansion, fallen on evil days, inhabited by Mansur. In Valmont's Journal I could see every detail of the strange architecture, the strange furniture, the Korans and charms and personal adorn-

ments of Bibi Mâh herself, as she sat writing her letters in the primitive Persian fashion; smoking her water-pipe; sipping the amber "caravan" tea, or nibbling at her strange meals. She was a tragic little person, Bibi Mâh, and inspired some very remorseful entries in the Journal.

And the oddest thing of all is that the Mirza, Valmont's Persian factotum, who was his guide, philosopher, and friend, until he disappeared in the swirl of the revolution, would not appear from the Journal to have had even inklings about Bibi Mâh.

It is not often that one gets a human document like Valmont's Journal, full of the small things, the loves, the amusements, and the everyday surroundings of the writer, while it also gives a keen eye-witness's account and analysis of events which write the history of the mysterious Middle East anew.

DOUGLAS SLADEN.

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PART I

NEW MOON

A SHAH OF THE ANCIEN RÉGIME AT HOME

(FROM A NATIVE PRINT)

THE MOON OF THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT

CHAPTER I

THE EAST A-CALLIN'

TEHERAN, *October 7th*, 1906.

ONE of my most cherished dreams is taking form at last!

These sunbeams shimmering on the snow-crowned peaks; the brilliance of this light, so blindingly luminous that my eyes may scarcely face it; the vitality of this pure air, beneath whose breath my very being grows faint; and the perfume of these autumn roses, whose petals strew the carpet at my feet, are each and all of them, indeed, such as Saadi and Hafiz loved and sang; while this wine which I drink to the health of old Omar Khayyam is of the same vintage as that which delighted and bemused the Poet of Nishapur. In a word, I am in Persia!

My house was once the residence of a Vizier, now in disgrace; and this great hall—the *talar*—where I am now sitting, with its spacious front opening upon the formal garden, its moulded ceiling, hung with fairy stalactites, is the identical one in which he too sat, cross-

legged, like this, upon just such a carpet, for the administration of justice. In this marble basin, beneath the spray of a miniature fountain, his very goldfish still disport themselves, forgotten in the haste of flight.

And, forgotten likewise, his gardener, Jamshid, a young Parsee, now lingers among the rose bushes of the garden, whence the monotonous burthen of his song is borne to me on the breeze :

> The Lily—her breast—hath stolen Repose from my heart ;
> The Narcissus—her eye—hath stolen Wisdom from my head ;
> *Ya dalam, dalam, dalam.* . . .
> (Oh, my Heart, my Heart, my Heart !. . . .)

I clap my hands, and a servant—I had almost said a slave—enters noiselessly, leaving his *pahpush*—Oriental slippers—at the door, and awaits the master's orders a few steps from my side, in an attitude of extreme humility and respect, his hands joined beneath the long sleeves of his garment, his head slightly inclined sideways.

As one to the manner born I say to him, "*Kalyan biyar !*"—"Bring me the water-pipe !"

"*Ba Chachm !*"—"By my Eye !"—he replies, retiring backwards with a profound salaam.

I am certainly "Persianising" myself with magical celerity.

Already I have acquired the art of inhaling the smoke of the *kalyan*, drawing it with sonorous bubblings into my inflated lungs, to exhale it valiantly through my nostrils in two voluminous misty columns ; already I can appreciate the charm of the slight giddiness, of the half-intoxication which one experiences after the fourth pull at the great pipe ; already I have overcome the initial feeling of repugnance to the idea that it has been kindled between the lips of the *Kalyanji* who now stands behind me, waiting for the last puff to remove it.

PERSIAN HOUSE WITH A TALAR IN THE MIDDLE

To face page 4

Yes, *already!* And it is but a moon since my arrival in Teheran—a month, as they say with us.

Should I blush for this, or is it rather a cause for self-congratulation? I forget which sentiment would best accord with the sovereign traditions of Western conventionality.

But have I ever been a true Westerner? As a child I was taken to Tunis in the suite of my father, the General in command of the French garrison—and if my governess was an Englishwoman—yet the companion of my rides, Mansur the Spahi, was an Arab. Arab, too, were my playmates at the College; Arab, Oriental, Mussulman, the atmosphere in which I grew up. Is it surprising, therefore, that I should feel at home in this far-off Asiatic town, whose aspect is so strange and repellent to the eyes of my fellow-countrymen? Is it astonishing that I should have slipped at once into the *pahpush* of the vanished Vizier and found them a perfect fit?

I could almost imagine myself his successor in office, and that the sounds of acclamation and cries of joy from the crowd passing along the street beyond the high wall of my garden were raised in honour of my accession to power.

But what is actually the meaning of this uproar? Mirza Jafar will inform me, for I see him hurrying across the garden. The Mirza is my professor of Persian, my secretary, I might almost say my shadow, since he scarcely ever leaves me until the sun has gone. This afternoon I sent him to the Amarat-i-Khurshid, where the Parliament is at present sitting, or rather, such deputies as have been able already to reach the capital. Among them, of course, are those of Teheran itself, a most unequal proportion of the whole, since the Constitution granted on the fourteenth day of Jumada-al-Ula, the third of August last, by the now popular Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah, accorded

to the capital sixty deputies, whilst allowing to the rest of Persia only ninety-six, who will come into official being, when ? Not just at present, if I may believe the rumours current, for the provincial Governors are doing all in their power to stave off the elections.

It is to-day—a day to be ever memorable in Persian annals—that the *Majlis*, the National Assembly, has been formally opened with much pomp by the Shah in person, surrounded by all his Viziers, the higher clergy, and the Diplomatic Corps. I ought to have been with these last, since I am a member of the French Legation, but my Minister, M. Chabret, decided that I could not accompany him on this occasion of official ceremony, as I had not yet been presented to the Shah, nor even to the Vizier of Foreign Affairs.

" Well, what's the news, Mirza ? What's all this excitement about ? Has the Shah already abrogated the Constitution, or what ? "

The Mirza stood for a moment, panting and breathless, then, slowly gathering himself together, he began with Oriental deliberation to sit down. Carefully crossing the skirts of his long khaftan before him, he smoothed them neatly downwards over his legs, drawing them under as he gradually subsided on to his knees, finally sinking back to squat on his heels in the usual Persian fashion, bowing gravely to me the while. He sighed profoundly, drew his hand down twice over his face from forehead to beard, breathing heavily as he did so, then, with a sweeping gesture, he cried, " *Al-hamdullah !* Praise to Allah ! the Constitution is definitely established, the Shah has sworn allegiance to it on the Koran. The ancient glories of Iran will be revived ! The very air is throbbing with liberty. Listen to those cries ! The people are beside themselves with joy ! I will tell you the whole story—Ah ! *dalam pur ast !* My heart is full ! I am stifling with joy ! "

The noise outside redoubled. I felt I must see for myself what was happening, and so, without waiting to hear more, I dragged Mirza Jafar on to the terrace—for Persian houses have no windows looking on to the street—and there, leaning over the parapet, we watched the people passing beneath us. *Khiaban Lalazar* (the Street of the Tulip-bed), one of the finest in New Teheran, is not very wide at this point, and the dense crowd was tightly wedged within its narrow compass.

From our lofty vantage ground we looked down upon a sea of heads, a moving, mud-coloured mass of *Kula nahmadi*—those khaki felt caps, the usual head-gear of the Persian of the lower class—merging into the deeper earthen hue of bronzed faces topping khaki-clad shoulders, until the whole effect was that of a muddy river, banked between walls of mud. Upon this stream there rode, barque-like, a huge landau, the wreck of some former Russian greatness, in which were seated, all smiles and hope, four deputies, in black frock-coats and conical-shaped *kulas* of lambskin, thickly powdered with dust from the road. Here and there in the khaki tide emerged some small island of colour—the green or dark blue turban of a descendant of the Prophet—or the white head-gear of the Mullas, whilst, like a sinister and menacing rock, a solitary Cossack horseman, black upon his sombre charger, dominated the whole. And the sun, before sinking behind the mountains, gilded the scene with a parting ray of triumph.

Mirza Jafar, too much overcome for coherent speech, kept up at my side a running invocation of the Imams. "Ya Ali! Ya Hasan! Ya Housayn!" he gasped.

I felt my bosom swell, my pulses quicken, all the patriotic chords of my being vibrated as for a new fatherland.

The crowd had drifted away; the sun had disappeared; yet still we lingered on beside the parapet, gazing with

unseeing eyes upon the empty street, where now only a few dogs—khaki-coloured as all else—prowled aimlessly about, ere starting off in quest of a problematic supper. Above us the sky flushed slowly rose, its pale turquoise hue shading off into delicate green against the horizon line ; the air grew suddenly cooler.

I was turning towards the staircase to go down, when, at the other end of the terrace, I caught sight of Mansur, my former Spahi and now, by my mother's special request, my confidential servant, standing out against the pale sky. He was calling in his pigeons, waving the little flag by which he lured them back to their cote, accompanying his signals by soft, seductive whistlings, at whose wooing sound the birds, high up in the air and still catching the sunlight, hidden from us by the mountains, began their slow descent, with wide, sweeping circles. As I stood still to watch, a solitary one here and there detached itself from the rest, and making a sudden, downward swoop with reckless somersaults, fell towards the earth, as if pierced by an invisible arrow, its former brightness turned into shadowy blackness as it dropped out of reach of the sun's dying rays. Then, once again, they rose, as if drawn upwards by the light above them, and rejoined their fellows in the flock wheeling and circling over our heads, and slowly, slowly making their way downwards.

The scale of colour in the sky became more intense ; in the centre a vivid red, it toned off towards the edges into mauve and lilac ; fainter and more blurred grew the outlines of the terraces ; the street below was already dark.

The pigeons had drawn nearer, they were circling now just above our heads ; we could hear the swirl and flutter of their wings, and feel the shiver in the air as they passed. They were black now, all over, like bats in the gloaming, as they settled at length upon the pigeon-cote and upon the head and arms of Mansur.

In the sombre depths of the sky, from which the sunset tints had slowly faded, some stars shone out, points of light in the dome of darkness; the chill in the air had sharpened, it had become quite cold. I turned my steps again towards the staircase, preceded by the silent Mirza, and was walking gingerly, with my hand against the wall which separated my terrace roof from that of my neighbour, when my ear was caught by the sound of feminine voices.

I raised myself on tip-toe, and looked down over the wall. Two women were crossing the courtyard below me, but, in the night which already reigned there, I could only distinguish the form of one, an old, bent crone, carrying a lamp, the shadow of which she cast across the patch of light, leaving the figure of her companion merely a darker blot upon the general blackness.

As I glanced down at them, a hand was laid with brutal violence on my shoulder, and drew me roughly to one side. It was that of the Mirza, beside himself with anger, and, in a voice of mingled rage and terror, he said, "That is a thing you must never do in Persia! He who violates with his glances the sacred privacy of the harem is punished by death!" And in the pregnant silence which followed I could hear my own heart-beats—like a muffled drum of warning.

I shook myself free, alike of the impending sense of peril, and of the Mirza's detaining hand, and we continued our way down. The scent of the last roses, subtle and intoxicating, floated up to us on the night breezes, and with it came a dying echo of the burthen of Jamshid's song:

The Lily—her breast—hath stolen Repose from my heart;
The Narcissus—her eye—hath stolen Wisdom from my head;
Oh, my Heart, my Heart, my Heart!
For she is fair as the Moon,
The Moon of the Fourteenth Night!

CHAPTER II

THE MOON OF SHAABAN

20 Shaaban—October 9th.

ON my return last night from an endless dinner at the Legation, I could not resist the temptation to stroll up on to the terrace—was it to watch the moon rise? There is an extraordinary fascination for me about that terrace; the view from it is simply magnificent, and I cannot understand how it was that I did not realise its possibilities sooner, for I have been some time here already, and yet I never really *discovered* the terrace until the day before yesterday, when I went up there to watch the procession of the deputies. That visit was a revelation. Since then I have been up there three—no, four times: once to watch the sunrise—I was too late for that, though; then to see Mansur's pigeons; then for a sunset—they are so lovely here that one can never tire of seeing them. And finally, it was the moon that drew me there last night for the fourth time.

Alas, she *would* not make up her mind to rise, that Shaaban moon! the night, however, was so splendid, so starlit, that I remained, spellbound, gazing at those heavenly bodies—so far more numerous, and so much more at home in this sky than in our own—oblivious even of the cold.

And at last—there was a moon—a sudden apparition, for I had my back to her when she rose above the horizon—and I felt myself thrilled with an unaccountable emotion, something more than mere admiration, something which yet was scarcely fear.

CHAPTER III

AN ASTAGHBAL

October 17th.

TO-DAY was the date fixed for the arrival at Teheran of Madame Chabret, the wife of the Minister of France, and in accordance with the agreeable custom in vogue here, we of the French Colony united to give her a brilliant *astaghbal*—advancing some distance to meet her and escort her into the town.

Her fame as a charming woman had preceded her, and no one even of those engaged in business had hesitated about sacrificing the afternoon in honour of the Minister's wife, so that the entire French population of Teheran—some twenty or thirty souls, including a few individuals under the protection of the Republic—had turned out for a grand march past on the Kasvin road, some in vehicles, others on horseback, everyone laden with flowers.

Of course, the Legation was there in full force, although that is not saying much: Count Philippe de Vecquincourt, Second Secretary of Legation—there is no First Secretary, the post not being considered of sufficient importance—the Oriental Secretary, the Chancellor, and myself, Third Secretary, this made our sum total. The Minister himself had already rejoined his wife, having gone some twelve days ago to Enzeli to meet her, full of impatience for her coming.

For weeks his whole mind has been centred upon this journey, and the preparations which have been made for it would do honour to a Princess in the Thousand and

One Nights. A caravan of mules started some time back under the command of the major-domo, a majestic and autocratic Italian, bearing tents, beds, tables, chairs, and a whole battery of kitchen utensils, accompanied by the *chef* and most of the servants of the Legation. The tents were most sumptuous, all lined with Kashan velvet and Yazd silk, and one for every occasion—a drawing-room tent, a dining-room tent, tents for sleeping in, tents for this and tents for that, I should be afraid to say how many. M. Chabret has an intimate and affectionate knowledge of his wife's weaknesses; she is extremely partial, it appears, to pomp and magnificence, and he knew that in this display of Oriental splendour he was preparing for her an agreeable surprise. And indeed, where can one journey with such splendour or so sumptuously as in Persia, where still linger the traditions of the satraps of yore?

Vecquincourt knew the Chabrets well, having been at Munich as Attaché to the Legation when our Minister was there as Chargé d'Affaires, and from him we heard all about Madame, and his information, together with our natural curiosity, lent an added piquancy to an expedition of itself full of charm. The day was clear and beautiful, with the usual purity of atmospheric effect under a delicately blue and cloudless sky, in which the sun shone with a dazzling brilliance. Its glory reflected a thousandfold upon the snowy mantle of the heights, and the great stony plain with its patches of cultivation, and its occasional villages, dotted here and there, with their battlemented mud walls overtopped by clumps of poplars or plane trees. All round was a horizon of mountains, enclosing, as jealously as a harem garden, this land of Islam.

The effect is grand, and although never-changing, it ever strikes one afresh. Every day, as if for the first time,

I am filled with a sense of its charm, and each time that I go for a gallop across the plain of Teheran I am impressed anew by all that unutterable wild grandeur, over which there hovers a spirit of primitive and savage freedom. I seem to hear the mysterious call of a far-off nomadic heritage.

To-day the chatter of my immediate companions and of my other countrymen all along the road accentuated the exoticality of the landscape—but it also destroyed its magic.

The rendezvous for the *astaghbal* was a certain tea-house on the banks of a wide stream of running water, and there accordingly our party alighted, the rest of the procession following our example.

As we all chatted together outside the tea-house, we eagerly scanned the horizon towards Kasvin and the north, but as yet there was nothing in sight, and Vecquincourt despatched his servant in that direction with orders to return at full speed so soon as he should see any signs of the expected party.

The sound of hoofs coming rapidly from the opposite quarter turned our attention in the direction of Teheran, and at some little distance we perceived, through a cloud of dust, a horsewoman, in a white helmet, followed by a servant brandishing an enormous bouquet of flowers. It was like a vision, the nimbus of dust giving emphasis to its unreality, the vision of an elegant Parisienne galloping along the Bois de Boulogne.

Vecquincourt advanced to meet her, and I followed, as if instinctively. He held out his hand with a gallant air, to assist her in alighting, and as we were thus brought all at once face to face he introduced us, " M. Edouard Valmont, Madame Basqueville ! "

It was done so suddenly that we could neither of us find anything to say, although our eyes were eloquent.

She took the bouquet which the servant held out to her, and addressing herself to Vecquincourt, said, "I was afraid I should be late, though one never is late in Persia, is one? Time means so little here! But I was detained by an important client—" And turning towards me, she continued, graciously, "M. de Vecquincourt omitted in his brief introduction to acquaint you with my titles!"

"Of course, how stupid of me!" cried Vecquincourt. "Madame Basqueville is the Envoy Extraordinary and Ambassadress Plenipotentiary of King Paquin at the Court of Persia!"

"Or in plain words," she amended, with a smile, "I am the representative in Teheran of the Maison Paquin of the Rue de la Paix." Then, lightly changing the subject, "But why," she asked, "are you waiting on this dusty road? There is a garden quite close by, where you would find it much pleasanter. Allow me to do the honours—the wives of the proprietor are clients of mine—besides, Europeans are always welcome in these gardens on the plain of Teheran."

I admired her ease of expression, and the slightly cavalier style in which she treated us, so different from that of our other "subjects." She had undoubtedly the *cachet* of a woman of the world, and Vecquincourt's manner towards her seemed to confirm this—if confirmation were needed. She wore a riding-habit of perfect cut, a Paquin masterpiece, and beneath the wide brim of her helmet wavy masses of exquisite fair hair shaded the loveliest face imaginable.

She gave some orders in Persian to the servant who had been holding the horses, stroked her own mount affectionately, and then led the way to the garden. A small door beside the entrance gate happened to be open; we passed through it, and found ourselves suddenly in an

oasis of verdure, a straight alley, bordered with willows, and on either side endless clusters of fruit trees.

A Persian attendant approached us, bearing a copper tray on which steamed tiny glasses of clear golden tea; he was followed by a boy, who spread a carpet on the ground, upon which we seated ourselves.

"I suppose this is the first Persian garden you have visited?" said Madame Basqueville, addressing me, "but perhaps it is not your first disillusion since your arrival in Asia! You expected, no doubt, masses of roses and cypress trees raising their dark crests skywards! You find that in the gardens of Shiraz, beloved of Saadi, but we have beautiful gardens here also—I say we advisedly, for of the three of us I am the oldest Teherani. I have lived here for two years."

"Madame Basqueville is the youngest *doyenne* of the Diplomatic Corps," interpolated Vecquincourt, with a little bow.

"Do not make fun of me!" she said, a look almost of sadness stealing into her eyes. Then, with a sudden turn of the conversation, "How do you like Persian tea, M. Valmont? Persian tea—of Chinese origin?"

"It is delicious," I answered, "and of such a lovely colour."

"It is the popular beverage in Persia."

"But wine, also, although forbidden, is not lacking in popularity, if we may believe the poets!" interposed Vecquincourt.

At the end of the alley in which we found ourselves, a Persian of the lower class was seated on a carpet beside a fountain, with two closely-veiled women, drinking tea like ourselves, and smoking a kalyan, which he handed from time to time to his companions.

"What a typically Persian scene!" said Mme Basqueville, looking towards them. "A garden—a spring of

water—women with impenetrable veils—a carpet—a kalyan—and tea. . . ."

" Nothing is lacking but a background of faïence ! " put in Vecquincourt. " And—" he went on after a pause, " to complete the picture, here comes a nomad of a robber tribe of the South, a Bakhtiyari ! But don't be alarmed, Madame Basqueville, he is a friend ! "

Coming towards us I saw a tall young man in an ample kaftan with floating sleeves, a high white felt *kula* on his head.

" Why, it is Isfandiar Khan ! " cried Mme Basqueville, " you may well call him a friend ! "

Isfandiar Khan Bakhtiyari ! But I, too, knew him—and had known him long, ever since the old days in Paris ! We were good chums, out of touch with each other through a mutual laziness in correspondence, and I had imagined him in some inaccessible corner of his native mountains. What a surprise ! We grasped one another's hands warmly. He, too, had come to welcome the Minister and his wife, for he had a grateful affection for France, on account of the education he had received there.

At this moment a messenger came for us, with the news that the long-expected cavalcade was in sight at last.

A mounted *jalowdar* led the way, caracoling in front of the Minister's landau, which was further escorted by two mounted *gholams*. Behind came the carriages, followed in their turn by *tarantas* or baggage carts. The caravan of mules with the tents and other impedimenta would not reach Teheran until late that night.

When they arrived at the tea-house, opposite which we were all lined up, the vehicles stopped ; the Minister and Mme Chabret descended from the landau, and from the victoria which followed, the maids, who retired to a discreet distance.

After the various presentations, the exchange of com-

pliments, and the *pishkash* of flowers, with which the Minister's landau was laden, we all resumed our former positions on horseback or in carriages, and the procession, now considerably augmented, advanced towards the town.

Vecquincourt had taken the left-hand side of the landau, making conversation with the Minister; I rode on the right, beside Mme Chabret, who discoursed to me at length about their journey.

The crossing of the Caspian Sea was the only dark spot in all her experiences; the uncomfortable steamer, the atrocious food, and, to crown all, when they got within a few cables' length of Enzeli, to the place beyond which vessels of a certain tonnage were unable to pass on account of the difficulties of navigation, a storm of wind sprang up, so violent that it was impossible to anchor, and the Persian boats which had put off to land the passengers and freight were obliged to return.

"I could actually see my husband in one of them, waving his handkerchief to me!" said Mme Chabret. "It was really too trying to be so close to each other—almost near enough to speak—and yet to be separated by the insurmountable barrier raised between us by the elements! Our steamer was obliged to put out to sea again, for it was not safe to remain in near shore."

"You were following an illustrious precedent, Madame," I said, "for such was the fate of Nasir-ud-Din Shah, when returning from his first visit to Europe. Just as his vessel was dropping anchor, at dusk, a storm of wind arose suddenly, and in the morning, when the Court assembled on the shore to greet their sovereign, to their astonishment the ship had disappeared. A wreck was feared, and the thoughts of the courtiers had turned already towards the Heir-Apparent, when the missing

vessel reappeared on the horizon, safe and sound, to try its fate again."

"We had no better luck," replied Mme Chabret, "for our steamer returned to Bakou and landed us on the way at Lenkoran, a little Russian port on the Persian frontier, where we waited for the next mail-boat to Enzeli. We had four days of it, in an indescribably awful inn, four days of incessant rain! Still, since we set foot on Persian soil everything has gone well with us, and I am delighted with all I have seen. But tell me," she continued, "are we far from Teheran?"

"No, Madame," I replied, "we are nearly there now. Those greyish yellow walls with the trees showing above them are Teheran. If you look out you will see the blue dome of a mosque, and the gate through which we shall enter, glittering in its new coating of faïence."

I read disillusion in her face. But a tinkling of little bells drew her attention for the moment to an approaching caravan of camels, picturesque and characteristically Eastern. It passed us almost at the same moment, with an indescribable tumult of noise and shouting, our *gholams* cursed the camel drivers, who in their turn yelled out orders understandable only by the camels to whom they were addressed, and who replied with strange, sonorous groans, as they writhed and twisted their long necks laden with bells and amulets.

"Oh, look at that camel's head-dress!" exclaimed Mme Chabret, pointing to one beast whose head was absolutely hidden beneath a mountain of woollen pompoms and ostrich feathers of every hue.

"It's quite in the fashion, isn't it?" replied her husband mischievously.

As we approached the town progress became increasingly difficult, carriages, carts, and caravans getting in our way every moment, but we entered at last, the

A TILE-INLAID GATE OF TEHERAN

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soldiers of the guard presenting arms as we came through the gate. Once inside we found ourselves in the interminable network of narrow streets, with their monotonous mud walls, whose dilapidated aspect still further disenchanted Madame Chabret.

" I had expected something very different ! " she said. " Is this really the capital of a country whose very name serves to conjure up visions of Asiatic splendour ? "

I smiled encouragingly. " You must not judge by a first impression, Madame," I said. " The glamour *is* there—when your eyes have learnt to find it ! "

As I spoke we reached the Legation building, a painful attempt at Western architecture, which even my optimism could not glorify. She looked at it in mute dismay. It was the last straw—*le coup de grâce !*

. . . . .

The day had left me with very different impressions : the earthen colour of the town appeared to me more gilded, the sky more blue. I had renewed an old college friendship and had made the acquaintance of two charming women—the agreeable Mme Chabret and the distracting Mme Basqueville.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH I SEE SOMETHING OF THE RIOTS

November —.

THE situation in Persia is strange, not to say disquieting. On the one hand, the Nationalist Assembly—the *Majlis*—is taking itself very seriously, and handling reforms with the ease of an infant blowing bubbles—a puff in the clay pipe of Legislation, and lo ! a bubble-law appears, takes shape, swells out, and soars into space, to the admiration of all beholders ; till it encounters some obstacle in its path, when it collapses at once, like the bubble it is, and disappears without leaving a trace. On the other hand, the abuses of the days of autocracy—of yesterday—are still rampant and flourishing in a robust old age. And, at the same time, the people seem to have awakened at last from their eternal lethargy, and there are nothing but rumours of revolts from all the four quarters of the wind. Tabriz and Shiraz take the lead, and the other great centres are not far behind. The result is economic ruin for the country, and consequent famine, the situation not being improved by the fact that the corn speculators are taking good care that their interests shall suffer no more than in past years. Teheran is in a state of ferment.

It is curious to note, in this connection, what little account is taken by Europeans of native insurrections. Up to the present the members of the European Colony in Teheran, more fortunate than their brethren in other

Asiatic towns, have escaped massacre. To say that the Persians have never thought of such a thing would be, at the least, an exaggerated statement, but, at all events, they have not dared to put their thoughts into execution, probably through fear of the Shah's reprisals, or of the intervention of the Foreign Powers. Whatever the reason—or possibly only by chance—the lives of Europeans here have been spared up to now ! But, as Vecquincourt said to me the other day, " this should not give too much confidence to the foreigners in Persia, and they do not seem at all to realise the dangers of the present situation." Of course, I know my colleague is apt to take a gloomy view of things, but he was not exaggerating when he thus depicted the situation : " The people," he said, " are rising against the corn-speculators, to whose gambling the present famine is largely due. The price of bread has gone up enormously ; in most of the bakers' shops there is not a loaf to be found, and you see groups of starving people walking up and down the bazars, shouting angrily, and threatening the frightened bakers."

I was able to verify his statements for myself, *de visu*, to-day, when going to the bazar with Mirza Jafar, who is, by the way, a most interesting cicerone, well-informed and full of delightful anecdote, and extremely picturesque in his long Asiatic robes. The hungry mob made an interesting study, and their behaviour lent an added charm to our excursion, since a spice of danger is always exhilarating, although the Mirza was far from agreeing with me as to that, and not over-pleased at being seen in that quarter of the town with a Frank. He knows well that in such troubled times the Mussulmans are always ready for an attack, however unprovoked, upon non-Mussulmans, and cited many cases of Armenians, Jews, and Parsees who had been murdered at different times by the mob without any cause whatever.

However, we reached the Booksellers' Bazar without any hindrance, and were soon absorbed in the contemplation of some old manuscripts. We had just discovered, wrapped in a dusty piece of stuff, a Gulistan bound in Vernis-Martin, illuminated with a thousand and one roses on a background of dull gold, and were bargaining for this treasure after the Persian fashion—leisurely drinking many cups of tea presented to us by the bookseller with incessant salaams—when suddenly we were startled by the sound of distant shrieks and cries.

"*Shuluk!*—the Riot!" exclaimed the bookseller. "If they are coming this way I shall have to close my shop."

He seized the opportunity to divert our attention from his book, which he seemed by no means anxious to sell, and offering the Mirza a puff of his *kalyan*, started talking about the bread question. "If the Shah were only as stern as his father," he said, "we should have nothing of all this. He was a lion. He was feared. Under him we were wise and happy. Once, I remember, when there was a shortage of bread, he came to the bazar and said to one of the bakers, 'Why is it that there is no bread in your shop?' 'We have nothing to put in our ovens, Your Sacrifice!' was the unfortunate answer. 'Let himself be put in!' said the Shah, who was full of wisdom. The following day there were loaves of bread in every baker's shop, many nice and crisp loaves of bread!"

The noise had died away in the distance, and peace reigned once more, at all events in this corner of the bazar. I came back to the question of the book which had so greatly excited my enthusiasm. It was a manuscript, undoubtedly very old, and in a most remarkable handwriting, a fact that added tremendously to its value, since, in this country where printing as yet is but little known or practised, caligraphy is one of the most highly es-

teemed arts, if not indeed the highest of all. Pages of certain celebrated caligraphers fetch as much here as do, with us, the masterpieces of our best painters. And so, being accustomed to dealing with Orientals, I was careful not to betray my determination to secure this *chef d'œuvre* at all costs. Comfortably installed, with time at my disposal, and my cigarette case well stocked, I felt myself fully equipped for the combat. The bookseller named his price, I told him mine, and then I left the bargaining to the Mirza, whilst I regaled myself upon the scenes of the bazar around me.

The Booksellers' Bazar conveys somewhat the impression of a theological college. It is more peaceful than the others, and most of those one meets there are either mullas or students for the priesthood—mullas in the clerical as well as in the learned sense of the term—whilst the very architecture of the place, the pointed arches of its high vaulted galleries, the whitewashed surface with its relief of thin green moulding, is in itself suggestive of pious contemplation.

The customers were squatting in front of the booths, upon a wide stone bench covered with matting, and my attention was particularly arrested by the interesting face of one of their number, a man of ascetic appearance and a piercing gaze. I asked the Mirza about him.

" That is Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din," he said, " our greatest preacher, the Prince of Truth-tellers, who, through his advanced and Liberal ideas, has become the clerical champion of constitutional reforms."

The bookseller, following my eyes, had risen, and was rummaging among his store of books. He drew out one that appeared perfectly new, and handed it to the Mirza.

" This is the famous ' Garment of Purity,' " said the latter, after glancing at the title, " the author of which is that very Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din. Ah ! I do wish you could

hear him! He preaches every Friday at the mosque of Sadr-ul-Ulama, quite near here. But, of course, it is absolutely impossible, for no Christian is allowed to enter our mosques, as you know."

The echoes of the disturbance rose again in the distance. The Sayyid mounted his white mule and was soon out of sight. And then the voice of the muezzin rang out from the neighbouring mosque, in the call to prayer. Our bookseller fetched a jar of water, turned his sleeves up to the elbow, removed his shoes, and performed his ablutions, after which he proceeded to his prayers, right in front of us, with no concern whatever either for our presence or for that of the passers-by. I could not help wondering to myself what Christian of us all would have dared to do the same. This simplicity, this carelessness of public opinion, this serenity in devotion is to be found nowhere but amongst the Mussulmans. I was deeply moved. The incident brought to my mind the force of that impression of Renan's: "I have never entered a mosque without a strong feeling of emotion; shall I say it—without a certain regret at not being a Mussulman."

The tumult was drawing nearer again; we should have to be quick over the conclusion of our bargaining. I gave the Mirza a hint to meet the bookseller half-way. And scarcely had they come to terms, when the noise increased still more, and the Mirza, with the precious book concealed beneath his flowing garments, led me hastily away through the narrow and deserted side-streets. There we encountered nothing but a few lean dogs, and, under an archway, a sick beggar, upon whom I bestowed a coin. He took it without thanks, and, leaning over, cleansed it in the gutter from the pollution of my Christian touch!

The bazars of Teheran stretch along the southern part of the town, and we were obliged to traverse them now in order to reach the northern district, the quarter of the

Legations, with its wide, tree-bordered streets, reminiscent, but for their foreign and picturesque appearance, of the avenues of certain European cities. In spite of the Mirza's fears and forebodings we set off through the long, vaulted galleries, in which, in the daytime, ordinarily all the vivid life of the East concentrates itself, and where men from all parts of Central Asia jostle each other in a splendid medley of colour between the two rows of glittering shops. Now, however, fortunately for us, the bazars were almost empty, on account of the panic that was everywhere visible in the closing shops and departing customers, and we were able to get through unmolested.

It was a different matter outside. When we arrived at the Nasiria Avenue, near the Ark—that agglomeration of palaces surrounded by fortified walls, inhabited by the Shah and his harem—we found the starving mob clamouring for bread, and demanding the heads of those who had made " the corner " in corn. But there was no answer to their cries. The gates were shut and strongly guarded: behind the tile-covered *mashrabiyas* of the Shams-ul-Amarat—the Sun-of-the-Palaces—I could see in imagination the many anxious eyes of the ladies of the harem looking out upon the scene.

For the most part the crowd consisted of poor emaciated wretches, ragged and hunger-worn, but here and there amongst them were to be seen some of those roughs who, like evil birds of prey, are always to the front wherever a fight is expected : " Bull-Necks," their broad shoulders towering above the rest of the crowd, " Felt Kulas," their brothers in vagabondage, and " Lutis," jugglers, rogues, and thieves. And, amongst all these, yet another incongruous element, a few of the better-class citizens, some mullas, and even one or two people of standing, had not been afraid to join the throng, under pretext of peacemaking, often false enough, as in the case

of a mulla near to whom we found ourselves, and who was insinuating that the present unhappy conditions were due to the anger of Allah against the Constitution. He was a stout man, of middle height, and wearing a huge green turban. A large Semitic nose, with wide nostrils, a sensual, full-lipped mouth and vicious, shifty eyes made him a repulsive type, the more so from the suggestion of effeminacy that, in spite of his long beard, seemed to permeate his whole personality.

"That is Mulla Sayyid Ibrahim," murmured Mirza Jafar in my ear.

The name was familiar to me, and much had been told me about the man. Native of some province on the shores of the Caspian Sea, he had come to Teheran, and had managed to attract the attention of the Shah, being the only one of all his entourage able to allay the fear with which the sound of thunder inspired the royal breast. Whenever a storm broke out His frightened Majesty sent for him, and remained closeted with him in an underground chamber, secure from the disturbing sound of the elements. From the Palace his influence had spread to the people, to the populace above all, to whom his vulgar fanaticism and his holy origin as Sayyid—descendant of the Prophet—made strong appeal. At one moment he had made common cause with the Liberal Party, but with him, as with Mohammed Ali, the Heir-Apparent, this move was inspired purely by personal hatred of the now disgraced Grand Vizier. He had imagined, also, at that time, in common with many other mullas, that the Constitution would weaken the power of his benefactor, Muzaffar-ud-Din, and so give the clergy the upper hand. Upon the establishment of the *Majlis*, finding that there was more to be lost than gained for him and for his fellows in the new order of things, he had returned to shelter himself beneath the shadow of the royal sword. The

Nationalists had nicknamed him the Obscurantist, and also the Bearded Woman, likening him thus to that monster which, according to popular belief, is to appear upon the earth, the perpetrator of untold crimes and wickednesses, as one of the signs foretelling the end of the world.

Mirza Jafar then pointed out to me another man, about fifty years old, tall and richly dressed, standing close beside the mulla. "That is your neighbour, Baghir Khan," he said, adding in a whisper, "He is a corn speculator himself, and has come here to-day to throw dust in the eyes of the people."

"*Qui se ressemble s'assemble!*" ("Birds of a feather!") thought I.

The crowd around us made no concealment of its hostility, though no one dared molest us, and the Mirza, more nervous than ever, was for turning back. We could easily make a way round somehow, he urged, and it would be safer than going on.

At that moment, however, a tramcar came along—a tramcar, fancy!—in the midst of so characteristically Asiatic a scene! It was civilisation holding out to me a helping hand. I jumped hastily on to the car, and found myself presently wedged in between my trembling Mirza and a mulla—why, Mulla Ibrahim himself! I was amazed to hear him greet me with a smiling "*Bonjour, Monsieur!*" He was in the best of tempers, and laughed at everything, at the crowd, at the riots, and at the Persian in a black frock-coat (made in Germany), who was sitting in front of him, carrying a large camera. "He is," he informed me, "a Shahzada, a prince, offspring of one of the fifty-eight sons of Fath Ali Shah." And he began talking of this and that, as if nothing at all was happening, and as if we were old acquaintances. There was no need for an introduction to show him who

I was, and Baghir Khan beside him followed his example.

At last, after many difficulties, we arrived at the Artillery Square, the Piccadilly Circus of Teheran. The tram was here stopped by the mob, who took away the horses, and the women in the "ladies' compartment" began to shriek piercingly.

With the help of the descendant of the Prophet, we made our way through the crowd, who, to indulge their hatred of European institutions, were now busily engaged in breaking the car to pieces; and passing in front of the Bank of Persia, a gorgeous palace, adorned with brilliantly coloured tiles—an obvious symbol of the power of England, the creator of the bank—we got into the Street of the Tulip-bed.

The rioters, having satisfied their instinct for vengeance upon the tramcar, set it on fire, and went home delighted, though still hungry.

THE ARTILLERY SQUARE OF TEHERAN

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CHAPTER V

ON THE TERRACE

NOW that I have "discovered" the terrace I invariably wander up there on my return from my daily ride, reverting thus to an ancient habit formed in Tunis, where the terrace plays an important part in the domestic life of the people.

There, as soon as the declining rays of the sun allow of it, everyone seeks the housetop, to breathe in the reviving breezes from the sea, and to watch the tide of life ebbing and flowing in the harbour of Lake Bahira, above which great flocks of flamingoes hover like a cloud of rosy triangles. Here the Arabian women spend many a pleasant hour, chatting idly in the cool air, picturesque objects, in spite of the disfiguring veil; and here the buxom Jewesses, clad in closely-fitting garments, gold-embroidered, and with brilliant foulard head-scarves, bring their sewing and their gossip of the bazars. And when nightfall is ushered in from each minaret by the voice of the muezzin, twinkling lanterns spring out everywhere in the darkness, and through the shadows comes the sound of slow nasal singing, accompanied by the faint tinkling of guitars and the curious throbbing rhythm of tom-toms.

Teheran is a stranger to this aerial life; her terraces are all enclosed by walls concealing those upon them. By day they are silent, nor are their nocturnal echoes ever wakened by any sweeter music than the bark of some

vigilant watch-dog. The secret of the harem is more jealously guarded here in this country of a stricter Islamism, where even the muezzin is often denied his minaret at prayer-time lest his eye should fall on a courtyard.

My terrace overlooks the Street of the Tulip-bed on one side ; on the other a wall of about four feet high separates it from that of my neighbour, Baghir Khan, and Chance has willed that the two *anderûns*—the two harems—should back on to each other. Since Mirza Jafar's severe reprimand the other night I have not been near that wall again, but I cannot say that I have not observed it with interest ! On several occasions I have heard whisperings and stifled laughter coming from the other side. And I discovered yesterday that a hole had been bored right through the wall, through which curious eyes were watching the curious animal that I am for them. I did not move a muscle. I appeared deaf and blind. My whole attention was concentrated, apparently, upon Mansur's pigeons.

And, indeed, I am beginning really to feel an interest in these beautiful birds, so busily engaged in love-making that this late season finds them still billing and cooing as if it were the spring.

CHAPTER VI

THE RÔLE OF FRANCE IN PERSIA

FOR the last few years the attitude of France towards Persian affairs has been passive rather than active. Her commercial interests in Persia, although ranking third after those of England and Russia, are not such as to urge her into taking an active part in the politics of the country; she prides herself chiefly upon the strength of her moral influence amongst the more enlightened classes. In spite of the insinuations of certain of the Indian papers, her archæological mission in Arabistan, the Persian Arabia, has no other object than that of research into an almost legendary past. The semblance of a fortress which she has erected upon a hill of ancient Susa is merely for the protection of her archæologists against the plundering Arab tribes of a district in which most valuable discoveries have been made, firstly by M. and Mme Dieulafoy, and later by M. de Morgan, of documents dating from the remotest period of the Elamite Empire.

We need scarcely mention, perhaps, that in 1898 a French Chargé d'Affaires, with some initiative, almost concluded a negotiation for a loan to the Persian Government, since the attempt was suppressed by M. Delcassé, on the grounds that France had nothing to gain by interference in the affairs of the Middle East, and that it was better to leave to our good allies the Russians the negotiations, the anxieties, and the advantages of such a transaction, whatever may have been the opinion of the

Grand Vizier of the moment, who owed so much to the Russians, and who would have felt more free had the guarantees claimed by the lenders been in other hands than those of his protectors and masters.

That France does indeed exercise a moral influence in Persia is proved by the results, especially in matters of usage and fashion. For instance, if a Persian speaks any European language at all, it is always French; French, the language of international relations between Persia and the Powers of Europe, the language employed also in the lectures at the Polytechnic School of Teheran (an imitation of our French Polytechnic School), at the School of Political Sciences, at the School of Science, and at the School of Agriculture, the language taught in sixty other private schools in the capital, to say nothing of many provincial ones, and even in the German School; French the language, again, spoken naturally by all the French doctors who have been successively in attendance upon the Shahs and upon the highest dignitaries of Persia, and spread by their means throughout the country.

And, not only is the rising generation of educated Persians thus familiar with our language, it possesses also our literature and our history, and it is in this way only that France, incidentally, by her mere actions and example, exercises a very definite influence upon the modern faction in Persia.

What this party has dimly felt for many years, the French Revolution has expressed, in a manner never to be forgotten; it is that history which has guided the Nationalists, enlightened their troubled minds, and, in short, decided a movement which has opened before them new and clearer horizons. But they make the mistake of forgetting the history of the centuries that preceded our Revolution, of ignoring the long chain of events that led up to it, and of thinking that a similar movement

MUZAFFAR-UD-DIN SHAH, THE FATHER OF THE CONSTITUTION

(PHOTO BY PRINCE ABDULLAH MIRZA)

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would at once prove successful in Persia ; they refuse to realise that the nation is not ripe for such an upheaval, nor ready to take its part in it with the necessary perseverance.

Could they, indeed, as they assert, do without the assistance of outsiders ? It seems scarcely probable.

France would most certainly rejoice to see her English friends and her Russian allies assisting the Persians in their work of reorganisation. This country, full of unexploited natural wealth, is well worth a revolution, as the Persians themselves are worthy of it ; a quick and sympathetic race, whatever may be said to the contrary, and whatever may be their evident shortcomings. To sow in the soil of Iran would be to prepare a rich harvest, and besides the advantages to be gained, it would be a magnificent achievement.

There is no doubt that England is favourable to the regeneration of Persia. Her love of liberty and of civilisation would suffice to make her set aside all selfish interests. But does the Russian Government cherish the same sentiments towards the Persian Nationalists ? Not so many years ago that Government openly favoured all that it judged likely to advance the decadence of Persia, and looked indulgently upon the weaknesses and extravagances of the Shah and of his Court. Russian influence was paramount at that time, not only in this part of the country, which constitutes its natural zone of influence, but even in the British sphere, upon which it encroached commercially, even going so far as to bring about the creation of a tariff prejudicial to British traders. Fortunately, England has recovered her position, and has become once more of weight in the Persian political balance. It is to England that the partisans of Liberty have turned, and when, seeking refuge to the number of more than fifteen thousand in the gardens of her Legation,

they demanded from the Shah a Constitution, he was obliged perforce to promise them one, and not long afterwards to fulfil that promise.

And France applauded this success, for which her moral influence had, in some measure, prepared the way.

CHAPTER VII

ISFANDIAR KHAN BAKHTIYARI

IT is indeed by a great piece of good luck that I have come across Isfandiar again in Teheran, for in him I have a friend at once tried and true and interesting. We see a great deal of each other, therefore. As he is a remarkable horseman, I could not have a better companion for my rides. And, moreover, in his breast there beats the unspoiled heart of a Bakhtiyari; he has the freshness of mind of a primitive, the native dignity of his race, and not a single Persian vice.

Curiously enough, we first became acquainted in Paris, a few years ago, at the School of Political Sciences, where we spent two years side by side in the same form. He was my junior—vaguely, after the manner of those born in a country where the registration of births does not obtain, and my childhood having been passed in a Mohammedan land marked me out beforehand, as it were, as his natural friend and protector against "the ragging" of those youths whose inborn prejudice against an Oriental was still further pointed by the wave of anti-Semitism then raging in France. Their blind Chauvinism classed him as, more or less, a child of Israel.

He is a grandson of that celebrated Bakhtiyari chieftain, Mohammed Taghi, whose life has been most remarkably related by Sir Henry Layard. Force of circumstances and political reasons brought him at a tender age to Constantinople, where his education was begun at

the college of Galata. He was subsequently sent to Paris to finish his studies, and there his precocious intellect so blossomed out that he left the School of Political Sciences a student of the foremost rank. We had formed strong ties of friendship during the time of our joint studies, and it was from his narratives and his attacks of nostalgia that the desire to visit Persia first arose within me. With the enthusiasm of twenty years, I fell in love with his country, and set to work to learn his language, a study which procured me my recent appointment in Teheran.

On his return from Europe, Isfandiar's intention had been to go back to the mountains of his clan, but the Shah caused him to be " welcomed " at the frontier, and conducted to Teheran, fearing lest this educated youth should become a dangerous leader and succeed in accomplishing the task that his grandfather had attempted, of uniting all the Bakhtiyari tribes under one head. His Kajar Majesty had treated him well otherwise, and had at once appointed him his aide-de-camp, with the title and emoluments of *sartip*. This title, although its sound recalls that of the satraps of yore, and its sense is that of our Western *general*, is bestowed lavishly, and without the least consideration as to personal merit ; the Shah makes use of it as a New Year's gift, and, *faute de mieux*, has no hesitation in bestowing it even upon children. Thus it happens that in the streets here one encounters grave *sartips* of six or seven years old, wearing their uniforms with a martial air, their brows already wrinkled with the cares of an imaginary command, and their persons surrounded by a suite of grown-up people, all with an air of humble attention, *comme si c'était arrivé !* There are no children in the world who can play at soldiers so seriously, who are prettier or better deserving of a stick of barley sugar. Alas ! the Constitution is going to destroy these " Satrapies in Spain," as we might well call them,

although, indeed, there is a good deal more of reality about them than about the proverbial " castles," since they carry with them a salary—sometimes, even, a paid one !

The satrapy of Isfandiar is a reality, in so far as it gives him command, not, indeed, over an entire regiment, but over a single company of the troop of Bakhtiyari horse stationed in Teheran, a hostage for the good conduct of the tribes as much as a bodyguard. His uncle, Riza Kuli Khan, is their commander-in-chief.

The natural modesty of my friend leads him to translate his title of *sartip* by " Captain," so that the European Colony, amongst whom he is a great favourite, know him simply as Captain Isfandiar Khan Bakhtiyari.

Bakhtiyari ! What visions that word conjures up of wild, indomitable grandeur ! The Bakhtiyaris are the Highlanders of South-west Persia. For centuries they have dwelt behind the walls of their mountains, and their manners and customs have not changed. They claim to be of the finest Aryan stock ; they have never intermarried with the peoples of the plains, and their racial type is still the same. They are tall, handsome, with regular features, and the proud bearing and active step of the mountaineer. Their haughty, almost majestic dignity contrasts strongly with the servile and insincere politeness of the town-bred Persian. They despise the Persians and call them cowardly, cruel, and false. The Persians fear them as bloodthirsty robbers. " In the Bakhtiyari's land," the proverb says, " a man's life is worth no more than a sheep's." The Bakhtiyaris are polygamous ; their women are usually comely, and do not veil their faces.

Most of them are " Iliyat " or nomads ; they live by pasturage and hunting, and the occasional plunder of caravans. Now and then, like the Highlanders of old,

they drive off the cattle and sheep of the plains in raids that they call *chapus;* or wage war, clan against clan, for disputed pasturage or family feuds, for the " avenger of blood " is as active in the Bakhtiyari mountains as ever in ancient Palestine or modern Corsica.

In winter the clans live in the valleys, where their stone huts are gathered round the foot of a hill, on which the chief's stronghold is built. In summer they move to the upland meadows to pasture their flocks, and live there in tents and booths of reeds and branches. Their diet is frugal. They usually drink spring water, but few of them can resist wine when they get it, and they often pay no heed to the prohibitions of the Prophet. They are Shiah Mohammedans, like the Persians, but have special superstitions of their own.

Education is not a burning question in the Bakhtiyari world. Few except the political leaders can read and write, but all pride themselves on speaking the pure old Persian language, the *Farsi Kadim.*

Lawless as are these clans, they have one binding code—the unwritten law of hospitality. The traveller, even if a man of a hostile clan, is welcome; he is lodged and fed, and his life is safe while he is under his host's roof. This often complicates the network of tribal feuds; for the host must take up the quarrel of the stranger within his gates, and fight for him if he is threatened. But for the difficulty of travelling and the dangers of the mountains, the Bakhtiyari land would be ideal for the tourist. He would be sure of finding in every hut a free and frank welcome; for the host would be accounted dishonoured if he took the smallest payment, and no Bakhtiyari has ever stooped to the shame of " selling bread."

These wild tribesmen love their sons best of all; and, next to them, their horses. No sacrifice is too great for either, and often the favourite Arab mare is more luxuri-

ously housed than the favourite wife. Nowhere is there a better rider or a truer marksman than the Bakhtiyari.

They have always been practically independent. They resisted the Medes and the Persians, defied Alexander, and challenged Antiochus. Nadir Shah conquered, but could not subdue them. It was his idea to recruit a regiment from among the tribes—a regiment that distinguished itself by its bravery at the capture of Herat and of Kandahar.

One of their chiefs, Ali Mardan Khan, took advantage of the anarchy following the murder of Nadir Shah to seize Ispahan, and for a short while was the veritable ruler of Persia.

Never would they suffer a Persian governor among them, and the Shahs could only maintain their suzerainty by stirring up feuds between the clans, and intriguing against the power and life of the chieftains. Hitherto the wild tribes have been powerless without a leader; but if they found a head they might do great things.

Safe from civilisation in their tangle of inaccessible hills, they are still men of primitive instincts; energetic, bold, and strong, they understand nothing but energy, boldness, and strength, and only by these qualities can their chiefs govern them. Their ideas are those of a ruder age, and though one of their leaders, Sardar Assad, may be master of the enlightenment of Europe, there is every reason to suppose that he is too true a Bakhtiyari in his inmost soul to believe in parliamentary government.

Isfandiar is by no means of this opinion, and he informed me, with much appearance of mystery, that great things were to be expected from Sardar Assad and his countrymen.

"History," he added, "which is constantly repeating itself, has frequently, in Persia, as elsewhere, shown us

the spectacle of the mountains overcoming the plains. One day, I am certain, the world will see the Bakhtiyaris contributing to the restoration of Persia to her ancient power and glory."

And Isfandiar Khan Bakhtiyari will, perhaps, play no small part in the transformation.

CHAPTER VIII

MY FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE MOON

November 13th.

THE sun is bearable now, though still powerful enough, and it is delicious to bask luxuriously in the warmth of its beams, as I have been doing for a couple of hours this afternoon on the terrace, a carpet and some cushions under me, and on my knees, to keep me company, that huge and ancient copy of the Gulistan of Saadi bought the other day in the bazar. As a rule, Mirza Jafar helps me with the reading and translation of this manuscript, the caligraphy of which is still perplexing to my eyes, accustomed to the somewhat different and less florid penmanship of the Arabs of the West ; but to-day I thought that I should like to be alone with Saadi and the lovely sunshine, alone with the Peris of Space, who are said here to carry on mysterious intercourse with unworthy mortals.

But I tried in vain to read ; it was all I could do just to follow with my eyes the graceful, sinuous lines meandering across the precious parchment, my mind made no attempt to understand their meaning, being attracted " elsewhere."

A slight noise—so slight, indeed, as to be rather divined than actually heard—had engrossed my attention ; *frrtt !* like the rustling of some silken material against the party-wall. Was it one of my neighbours watching me through the little hole ? Or could it be a Peri of Space in search

of adventure? That I might intimidate neither the one nor the other, I remained quite still, assuming my most studious and preoccupied air, and keeping my eyes religiously on my book.

Frrtt! . . . then silence . . . and again . . . *frrtt!* More than ever my ears were on the alert.

Bzz! This time it was a fly that came and settled on a line of Saadi, which it ran through without interest. Its hopes deceived, it flew on to my hand, and thence on to my cheek. I was about to make a movement to drive it off when a prolonged *fr-rr-t-t!* stayed me, and upon a corner of my book I saw a shadow come slowly creeping, creeping, on and on, until it had darkened a whole page with its impalpable presence. Then it disappeared . . . and I drove away the fly.

But the persistent insect was back again directly, and almost at the same instant the shadow once more touched the Gulistan, stopped for a moment on the margin, crept from one page to the other, and finally covered the whole book.

To raise my head suddenly and look up would not have been a wise move; the Peris of Space—and the ladies of the harem—neither of them like being startled. I deemed it preferable, therefore, to maintain my attitude of immobility. With sidelong glances on the ground I watched the progress of the shadow, deciding to wait until it should have attained a certain spot and then . . . and then . . . *Frrtt!* And the sunshine had regained its empire over my book.

My tactics certainly seemed lacking in wisdom; at the same time, I have not lived for so many years in Mohammedan countries without having learnt of the benefits to be expected from the practice of patience, so that I by no means lost hope.

But nothing more followed, nothing but that unbear-

able fly, buzzing and indefatigable. Evidently I was not to the taste of the Peri of Space. *Tant pis!* I had better put her out of my head and have another shot at deciphering the arabesques of the Rose Poet. On the great page which the shadow had so lately touched with its intangible caress, after a solid block of prose writing, a quatrain was displayed, enclosed in lines of red and blue and gold, embellished with illuminations which strayed in amongst the words, interspersing them with blossoms. Over this tiny garden, so many centuries old, the clear sun shed its most brilliant rays. The letters seemed to come to life and to invite my perusal. How could I resist their magic appeal?

Since naught avails, let me arise and leave.

Saadi appeared to be counselling me here. The Persians frequently consult him thus; before taking a decision they open the book at random, and, according to the meaning of the first lines upon which their eyes alight—or, rather, according to the meaning that they themselves assign to the lines—they regulate their course of action. This is what is called "making *astákara.*"

Was I, then, to arise and leave? What was the next line?

Though down the way of swords I wounded crawl. . . .

With a little imagination, that was equally applicable to me. I "crawled"; I was, in truth, wounded by the swords of curiosity. I read on—

Perchance I shall attain to touch her sleeve.

Before such a prospect there was no room for hesitation. I arose. And, by an effect of telepathy to which the great Saadi was, perhaps, no stranger, there arose at the same moment on the other side of the wall, not a Peri of

Space, not a transparent shade, but a lovely Persian woman of flesh and blood.

We remained for a moment mutually spellbound, and as if paralysed, gazing open-mouthed into each other's eyes.

She was the first to move, and was about to disappear when—not to give the lie to Saadi—I caught hold of her sleeve and held her back. She dared not cry out, for to attract the attention of the other inmates of the harem to her equivocal position would have been to court eternal disgrace and loss. So she contented herself with struggling—covering her face with her other arm.

" Wherefore plunge me in darkness by hiding from me the most beautiful of moons ? " I asked, with truly Eastern rhetoric, and in very fair Persian. " Another glimpse, and you will have made roast meat of my heart ! "

Her arm dropped slightly, revealing her eyes—great, startled eyes, black and profound. She was evidently astonished at hearing such speech in the mouth of a Frank.

This initial success encouraged me, and I recited to her all the exquisite things I had learnt from the poets of her own country. I must have been guilty of some barbarisms, for I could hear her laughing silently. The victory was with me.

Her arm offered no resistance ; I loosened my hold, and she did not slip away. Then I whispered to her sweet things, such as can only be uttered in Persian, sweet in sense, and sweeter still in sound—a sweetness that lost nothing from my French accent. And she appeared to take a real delight in listening to them, these sweet things, which doubtless fell for the first time upon her ears, since the gentle art of flirtation is a grace unknown to the harem. She became oblivious of *les convenances*,

THE MOON OF THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT

(FROM A NATIVE PRINT)

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and her arm falling aside unheeded, left her face disclosed to my admiring gaze.

Although a most naturally feminine thing thus to allow oneself to be admired and complimented by a young man, it was, none the less, a most serious offence in the eyes of a Mohammedan. Now that the thing was done, the wisest course seemed to enjoy to the full the stolen waters. When Mother Eve had once bitten into the apple we may be sure she finished it to the very core.

Nevertheless, my lovely neighbour remained passive and without response. Lovely she certainly was, strangely lovely, I might indeed say beautiful. Never had I seen such marvellous eyes. Large, melting, almond-shaped, they shone in their liquid orbits like stars upon a lake, and eclipsed every other feature in her face, the small, straight nose, the mouth, no bigger than one of themselves, the colourless complexion, like satin forgotten in the sun. The rounded oval of her face was framed in a white muslin *chargat*, which covered the whole of her head, fell back over her shoulders, and was gathered in folds beneath her chin by a gold fastening, giving her that likeness to a cloud-girt moon of which the poets sing. Two jet-black bands of hair were parted over her forehead, leaving only a tiny space visible above the long arched brows.

After a monologue in which I exhausted my supply of Persian, I stopped, and our two silences mingled, leaving speech to our eyes, or rather to our souls, if it be true that the one is but the mirror of the other.

. . . . .

What will be the outcome of this contact of the souls of Asia and Europe? Will they be able to understand each other's language? Hardly! But these are big words to use of an innocent interview, a simple exchange of glances!

All the same, it is exciting, and dangerous, and hopeless,

utterly hopeless, for there is no fighting against the harem—one is defeated beforehand. And, besides, there is every chance that the adventure will have no sequel of any kind. When my pretty neighbour has realised the whole gravity of the affair, she will hate me as being responsible for the moral degradation of her having exposed herself to the gaze of a man who not only is neither her father nor her husband, but who is actually—that monster—an Unbeliever! And never shall I see her again.

'Tis a pity! Such eyes are not to be met with every day. And even with no vista of a . . . future, there was here material for a picturesque adventure!

Suppose I were to ask Saadi what he thinks of it all? I have left the quatrain unfinished—

> Since naught avails, let me arise and leave. . . .

How lucky that I stopped at the first verb!

> Though down the way of swords I wounded crawl,
> Perchance I shall attain to touch her sleeve. . . .

And here is the last line—

> And surely on the threshold dying fall!

Saadi, you are a poor joker!

. . . . . .

I quitted the terrace with mingled feelings, coupled with an irrepressible desire to recount my adventure to someone.

But to whom, good heavens? Vecquincourt is too prone to take the tragic view of things, and to foresee resultant diplomatic complications. The Mirza? That was not to be thought of. Isfandiar? Perhaps. He must have shaken off many of his Moslem prejudices whilst in Europe. And in the nick of time he was announced.

" I thought I'd just look in as I was passing," he said; " I'm on my way to pay a call on your neighbour . . ."

" Baghir Khan ! " I cried, interrupting him. " Why, I thought you were not on good terms with that stubborn old Reactionary ! "

" No more I am, but you must not forget that, in spite of Constitutions and the Liberal Party and all that, there's still an autocrat in Teheran—and one, moreover, to whom I am aide-de-camp—by the Will of Allah ! " he added, laughing. " And he has arranged my future for me—of course, without the least reference to my own opinions—after the usual manner of autocrats. And just you guess what that arrangement is ! "

" That you should make it up with Baghir and become his dearest friend ! "

" Better still—I am to marry his daughter ! "

It was an icy douche that made me shiver, and drowned at once every illusion I might have cherished. And what a strange coincidence ! The first Persian woman that I had ever seen was the fiancée of my greatest Persian friend ! Of course, that settled the matter—a man's friendships stand before the passing diversions of his idle hours.

" Such is life ! " Isfandiar went on, unwittingly voicing the conclusion of my thoughts. " Before long I shall have become the relative by marriage of the powerful and detestable Amir Bahadur Jang. Like a good Mussulman, I resign myself to my fate—and indeed it might have been worse. Report says that Baghir's daughter is pretty."

" Yes ! " I cried, thoughtlessly, in a tone of conviction.

" Who told you so ? " demanded my friend in surprise. His stern, enquiring look showed me that upon one point, at least, he had not shaken off his prejudices in European travel.

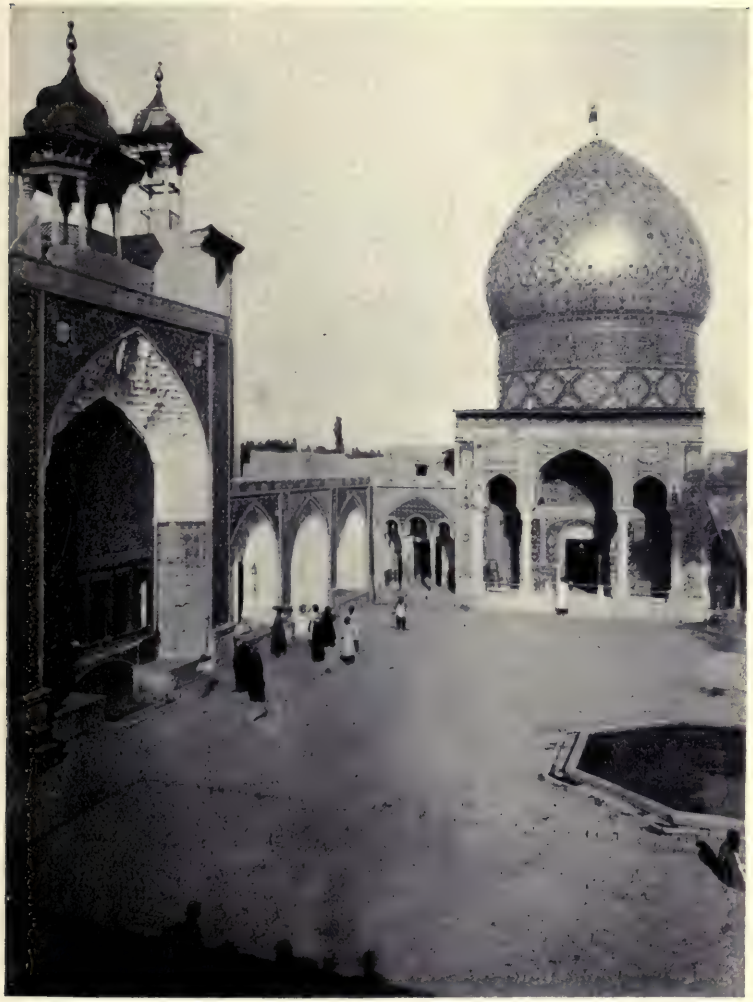
"Oh, nobody!" I replied. "My 'yes' was interrogative."

I went with Isfandiar as far as Baghir's door, and then started off on an aimless walk alone. Going down the Street of the Tulip-bed, I crossed the Artillery Square to its farther side, stopping to watch the play of sunlight over the coloured faïences of the portico opening into the Square of Exercise, an enormous walled-in place where the soldiers are drilled every day. These faïences, dating from scarcely half a century ago, a time when the ancient art of Persian ceramics was already lost, are not particularly beautiful. The colouring is crude, and would be painful, seen in any other atmosphere, and beyond the range of the magic sun of Iran, while the designs lack poetry. The traditional rose garlands and floral conventionalities are here replaced by life-size representations of prosaic soldiers, in European uniform, depicted upon yellow medallions surmounted by the Arms of Persia, the Lion and Sun.

Within the Square some Cossacks were being drilled in front of their barracks by their Russian officers; and, further on, the members of the English Legation and the clerks of the Imperial Bank were playing polo. I went over to watch this, the only English game that really appeals to me—and that, possibly, because of its Persian origin!—and entered the tent erected for the players and their friends, where several charming Englishwomen invited me to join their tea-parties.

At the close of the game I resumed my wanderings, still in a pensive mood. Chance guided my steps along the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs to the door of Madame Basqueville. I rang the bell. The lady was at home.

She received me in her boudoir, an apartment of infinite taste, in spite of the fact that its furniture, of Teheran manufacture, is of the simplest. I cannot imagine how



THE OLD BLUE TILES OF IRAN

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she has managed, with such poor material, to make it so comfortable, so French, and, what is more, so Louis Quinze. For the room contains nothing of the period beyond the curtains, which are genuine Pompadour, and two exquisite sketches by Boucher, in their antique frames of carved and gilded wood, the sole remains, the only witnesses of her former great possessions.

I am afraid I lacked discretion, for I lingered on and on. But I could not tear myself away from the charm of her conversation, and as I kissed her hand at parting, I felt that our intimacy had made a great advance. We were already old friends.

Between two who understand one another, a few moments' conversation often do more than years with others of even daily companionship. And this is often quoted as proving some previous existence in which such souls have been united by some close tie of kindred or affection. If this be so, then *la* Marquise de Nissac, *née* Yvonne de Basqueville—for such is her actual style and title—should in that former state have been my friend, my sister—or even my wife! It is like visiting some hitherto unknown yet perfectly familiar country, the impression, indeed, that I myself had on first coming to Persia. At the sight of the table-lands of Iran I felt as if I had rediscovered a country which I had not only seen before, but with which I was well acquainted.

This feeling of old acquaintance, coupled with the fact of our common exile, quickly led us into an exchange of confidences, and we imparted our life histories to each other in the most natural manner possible.

Yvonne de Nissac—and why should I not call her just Yvonne?—has seen much sorrow in her short life. Her parents, the Count and Countess Adheaume de Basqueville, of an ancient Norman family, more than half ruined during the Revolution, insisted upon her making a

"*mariage de raison*," as the expression goes, with the Marquis de Nissac, a rich landed proprietor of Provence. They met one winter in Paris at a ball, and were absolutely thrust into each other's arms by an old lady whose sole passion was matchmaking. The Marquis fell in love at first sight with Yvonne's beauty, and very soon he asked for her hand in marriage. As he was well born and rich, extremely *sympathique* to the Countess de Basqueville, and not unpleasing to her daughter, he was allowed to pay his addresses. He came to see her at stated intervals, always in the presence of her mother, and discoursed with her upon the weather, and hunting, and picture exhibitions, the theatre and literature—these latter, of course, very slightly, there being scarcely a piece and very few books that were considered fit for the eyes of a young French girl of the old school—and when the time came for them to marry, they had the merest and most superficial knowledge of each other's characters and ways. For the first two years things went smoothly enough; the luxury of life in Paris was pleasant to Yvonne, the hunting at Nissac amused her, she was made much of by everyone, and her husband refused her nothing. The third year was not so cloudless. The Marquis had developed a taste for racing, and went in for it madly, his absences from home becoming more and more frequent. Then he became nervy, mysterious, bullying, and passionate, so much so that he and his wife lived as strangers under the same roof, until at length, after a scene of unusual violence, Yvonne fled for protection to her own family. Feeling that her life was spoiled, she wanted to divorce her husband, but her mother opposed the step with all her Catholic principle, and succeeded at last in bringing about a reconciliation, which ended in Yvonne's returning to the Marquis de Nissac. For a few months she tried to make

the best of her insupportable life, for the sake of duty, hiding the truth from her invalid mother, until at length the day came when everything went smash, and her husband disappeared, leaving her absolutely ruined, his losses on the turf and at cards having swallowed up even his wife's meagre dowry.

The shock of this catastrophe, for which she held herself responsible as the moving spirit both in the marriage and in the subsequent reconciliation, killed Yvonne's mother. She died suddenly of an attack of heart failure.

To have remained on in the home of the Basquevilles after that would have been a moral suicide for the forlorn girl. She determined to start her life over again. It was not easy. What could she do? She had no money, and did not wish to come upon her father's already overstrained exchequer. There are few if any careers open to women of her social position, and her natural pride prevented any appeal to those whom she had known in the days of her prosperity. Besides, she wanted to get as far away as possible from the scene of her misfortunes.

And one day, as she was calling on Paquin, her former dressmaker, to make an arrangement about the payment of her account there, the great man told her that he was about to open a branch house in Teheran, for which he was seeking a competent and intelligent manageress. Up to that time he had been unsuccessful in his search, for everyone to whom he had spoken about it seemed to shrink from the prospect of an exile of several years from the *Ville-Lumière*, in the heart of unknown Persia. And yet the inducements offered were by no means inconsiderable, and included a good salary and an interest in the business. Indirectly he made the offer to her—and she understood. When she quitted the office she had in her possession a three years' contract, renewable at

option, by which she was appointed head of the Persian branch of the firm in the Rue de la Paix.

She had taken kindly to Teheran, her business there had prospered, and in these entirely new surroundings she had been able to forget in part the sorrows of her former life, although at intervals these were recalled to her memory by letters, of no disinterested nature, from that husband whom, out of respect for her mother's memory, she had decided not to divorce.

For myself, I had little of interest to tell concerning my past life. So I enlarged upon those more recent events which were engrossing all my thoughts for the moment, and recounted my afternoon's experiences, and their disappointing sequel in Isfandiar's news.

" Well, you needn't despair just yet," she said, " if, indeed, there is any foundation for hope in such an interview as that ! From your description I should say that it was not Baghir Khan's daughter whom you saw, but her cousin, an orphan, originally destined to be the bride of the brother, who died last year. I know both the girls well, and—I suppose I ought not really to tell you—but they have both questioned me already on several occasions about their Frankish neighbour. In the emptiness of their life, such a neighbourhood has whetted their curiosity. They cannot understand how a personage whose wealth and importance must be considerable, since he has been chosen by the " King " of France to represent him at the Court of the Centre of Universe, does not possess a wife—even a temporary wife ! They have often watched you passing along the street. The one you have seen, the cousin . . . "

" What is her name ? "

" Curiosity ! Her name is Bibi Mâh—Lady Moon—a name well chosen, since for a Persian her beauty would at once evoke a comparison with the moon."

"The full moon—that 'Moon of the Fourteenth Night' of which the poets sing!"

"Just so! Well—Bibi Mâh, who comes from the south, where blue eyes are unknown, asked me one day if the men of my country usually had eyes the colour of yours—like pools in the desert; and she added, "They must be *mubarak*—mascots—since they reflect the colour of the sky."

It had been the same story in Tunis. When I was a small child the Arab women used to stop my nurse and offer me sweetmeats for a glance from *mes yeux porte-bonheur*. I hated it then. To-day . . . I hardly know!

CHAPTER IX

THE DEATH OF MUZAFFAR-UD-DIN SHAH

January, 1907.

THE Father of the Constitution, the *Azad-Baksh* (the Giver of Liberty), Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah, passed away on the eighth at ten o'clock in the evening, in the Talar of Diamonds.

Following the Persian custom, the chamber of death was crowded. The Heir-Apparent — who arrived in Teheran three weeks ago, and who has since acted as regent—and two of his brothers, with Dr. Lindley, stood on either side of the arm-chair in which the sovereign had been placed, since his heart's action did not permit of a recumbent position ; whilst some of the highest officials of the kingdom, amongst them the Amir Bahadur Jang, Keeper of the Privy Purse, and some of the mullas, including Sayyid Ibrahim, together with the Grand Eunuch, formed a circle round him.

The numerous chandeliers, bright with electric lights, were reflected in a thousand sparks in the decorations of cut glass arranged in imitation of diamonds, and lit up the fresh gilding of the European furniture. They lit up also the pianos, gramophones, and pictures, the marble whiteness of the bust of Queen Victoria, and a view of the Coliseum in mosaic, presented by the Pope, and brought out the glowing colours of the orchids and rare flowers in the jardinières.

In these festal surroundings His Majesty breathed his

THE HALL OF DIAMONDS, IN WHICH MUZAFFAR-UD-DIN SHAH DIED

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last, his face towards Mecca, whilst those present repeated continuously the Shiite profession of faith: "There is no God but Allah; Mahomet is His Prophet and Ali His Vali." When he was dead the *Fatiha* was said, followed by the CXII *surate* of the Koran, and immediately the Grand Eunuch went out to close the doors of the *anderûn*, now without a master, where the women began to utter despairing cries, tearing their hair and covering their heads with ashes.

Prince Hajji Faridun, who performed the office of washer of the dead, stripped the corpse, and washed it three times with pure water, three times with an infusion of myrrh and cedar-wood, three times with an infusion of camphor. Then he placed round the neck a collar of beads of pressed earth from the Shrines of Kerbela, and put under the arm-pits two slender wooden wands, to assist the dead man to rise when, on the night following his burial, the two angels, Nakir and Monkir, should come to question him on the deeds of his life. And, finally, he clothed the body again in a shirt of pure white linen, covered its head with a shawl, and wrapped it up in a shroud of costly material and laid it in the coffin.

A flock of mullas had taken the place of the high officials in the Talar, and they recited the prayers for the dead incessantly until the afternoon of the next day, when the coffin was borne to the Takkia—the theatre where the Persian "passion" plays are performed during the Muharram.

The wives of Muzzaffar-ud-Din left the royal *anderûn*, and Mohammed Ali's only wife—his cousin—and her suite entered it in their stead.

In his will the deceased sovereign had expressed the desire to be buried at Kerbela; but it is doubted here whether his wish will ever be carried out, on account of the great expense that would be involved in the transport

of the body and the keeping-up of the tomb. It is thought that he was sufficiently extravagant during his lifetime; his travels in Europe have run the country into debt, and it is scarcely in a position to incur fresh liabilities over his final journey.

CHAPTER X

THE CORONATION OF MOHAMMED ALI SHAH

MEANWHILE, the Palace Astrologer, the Star-of-the-State, consulted the heavens to find out on what day the conjunction of the planets would be favourable for the coronation ceremonies. The twenty-second and the twenty-sixth of January and the third of February were auspicious dates, and the most propitious time was five hours after sunset. But Mohammed Ali did not wish to wait so long, and so the Star-of-the-State was obliged to declare in favour of the twentieth of January, in spite of the somewhat inauspicious position of Saturn and of the Moon, and instead of five hours after, four-and-a-half hours before sunset was fixed for the coronation.

The ceremony took place in the Hall of the Museum. The members of the *Majlis* were not summoned, but, after some hesitation, invitations were sent to the Corps Diplomatique. I went in full uniform, therefore, to the Legation, whence we were escorted by some of the Palace servants, in red livery braided with gold. They were on foot, and our carriages went at a foot's pace, as trotting is not considered sufficiently dignified for state occasions. Arrived at the Palace we crossed first the Court of the Marble Throne, lined with troops, and then the Gulistan (the Garden of Roses), a name identical with that of Saadi's poetical work. A marble staircase led us to a great gallery, at the end of which is the Peacock Throne,

and in which are collected all the marvels belonging to the Kajars—whence its title of Museum.

The Viziers and the high officials, clad in robes of state, in cashmir shawls with clasps of brilliants, stood to the left, around the throne of the Great Mogul—a golden arm-chair set with jewels—brought from Delhi by Nadir Shah. The Grand Vizier in his *khalat* embroidered with pearls, with clasps of pearl whence hung enormous emeralds, the special insignia of his office, was congratulating Baghir Khan upon the title just bestowed upon him by the new sovereign, in exchange—must we say it?—for a large sum of money. My neighbour was no longer simple Baghir Khan, but Baghir Khan the "Magnificence-of-the-Royal-Intimacy." His relative and patron, Amir Bahadur Jang, was also there; but he kept humbly in the background, for his position was doubtful; he had some powerful enemies in the new Court, and he did not know if he would be able to attain that ascendancy over the new Shah which he had had over his father. Liakoff, the colonel of the Cossacks, was talking with his fellow-countryman, Shapshal, a remarkably intelligent Russian Jew, who, from being a mere teacher, had become the confidant of Mohammed Ali.

Isfandiar Khan, in the same group, made a friendly sign to me when I entered in the wake of the Minister of France and Vecquincourt, to join the rest of the Corps Diplomatique at the other side of the hall.

My attention was now attracted to the Heir-Apparent, Sultan Ahmad Mirza, a child of ten years old, who was standing before the Peacock Throne in a black uniform braided with gold, with hussar frogging terminating in pearl pendants. A wide, pale blue ribbon edged with green crossed his breast, he rested his hand upon a curved scimitar covered with precious stones, and in spite of his extreme youth, his bearing was so majestic that one

BED LIKE THE LADY PEACOCK'S BED
(NOW THE PEACOCK THRONE)

(NATIVE PRINT)

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would have said it was he who was about to be crowned. His pretty, childish face was unaffectedly serious, and his fine almond eyes wandered over the imposing assembly with the lofty benevolence of a sovereign accustomed to command.

The Peacock Throne, in its mirrored recess, made a fitting background to his figure. It is a lofty dais of enamelled gold, and, like the Throne of Nadir, is set with precious stones. It is approached by two steps, supported by dragons of green enamel, and above the back glitters a diamond sun. Its name of Peacock Throne does not come, as has often been said, from the two birds—which are not peacocks—perched on the back of it, but from the favourite concubine of Fath Ali Shah, Taus Khanum, the Lady Peacock, to whom it was given by the Grand Vizier of the period, as a bed. Its splendour earned for it a more glorious future, and from being the bed of an odalisque it became the throne of a Shah.

A carpet of dark cashmir, blue-patterned, and bordered with pearls on blue velvet, covered it, and, above this, a large round cushion of pink silk, embroidered with pearls, seemed to call up the memory of its first purpose. On each side of this throne were Kajar Princes, holding the royal weapons, bucklers, sabres, and maces of jewelled gold; in front of them two brothers of Mohammed Ali, His Highness the Luminous-Ray-of-the-Dynasty, and His Highness the Right-Arm-of-the-Sovereign. The third brother was far away in a province of the West, busy getting together an army with which to contest the succession, after the usual tradition of Persia at every change of sovereign.

On an Ispahan carpet were crouching a score of mullas, headed by the Mujtahids Agha Sayyid Abdullah and Agha Sayyid Mohammed, the Shaykh Fazl-Ullah and

Sayyid Ibrahim. In the corner stood the dead Shah's jester, a fat, jovial little hunchback.

There was a sudden silence throughout the hall as the tall spare figure of an old negro stood out in the doorway. It was the Grand Eunuch, His Excellency the Confidence-of-the-Harem. He cried in a shrill voice, in Turkish, "*Gachin!*" ("Make way!") and Mohammed Ali made his entrance, preceded by two Viziers of Ceremonies, and crossed the hall between a double row of backs bent down to the earth. Etiquette forbids anyone to uncover his head in the presence of the Shah, so the diplomats had retained their plumed cocked hats, among which the "chimney-pots" of the representatives of the United States seemed somewhat out of place.

Bowing slightly, with my hand raised in a military salute, I watched the passage of the new sovereign. He was of middle height, stout, and tightly buttoned up in a black frock-coat, adorned with five rows of diamond clasps. He advanced slowly, trying his best to look majestic, but his pale, round, puffy face, his double chin, and his loose lips under the short, stiff moustache, together with his gold-rimmed spectacles, spoiled the effect.

The mullas rose and gave him the greeting of peace—"*Salaam Alaikum.*" He ascended the throne, and subsided on to his heels, leaning carelessly against the pearl-embroidered cushion of the Lady Peacock.

As it had been arranged that on this occasion the highest honours should be given to the clergy, it was Agha Sayyid Mohammed who spoke first. He confined himself to reciting this passage from the Koran: "O David, we have chosen thee to be the sovereign of the earth, therefore must thou judge between men according to justice and not follow thy passions, lest they should lead thee astray out of the way of God. Those who go astray out of

the way of God shall suffer heavy punishment, for they have forgotten the day of judgment."

The Shah did not look pleased at the choice of this verse ; it resembled a warning and a threat.

Agha Sayyid Abdullah next quoted the sacred book : " Say unto them, O God, Thou Who possessest all dominion, Thou grantest power to whom Thou wilt, and Thou takest it away from whom Thou wilt ; Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt and Thou abasest whom Thou wilt ; all good things are in Thy Hands, for Thou art almighty."

Now came the solemn moment for setting the crown on the royal head. As the mullas had not been able to agree which of them should be given this honour, the task fell to the lot of the Grand Vizier. He approached the Shah—who removed his astrachan *kula*—lifted the crown, and placed it on the august head. But his emotion led him to mistake the back for the front, and His Majesty was crowned the wrong way round. The mistake was quickly rectified by the Grand Vizier himself, and we beheld Mohammed Ali crushed beneath the weight of a huge diadem of pearls and other jewels, which he supported with both hands. It was too much for his head, and he was obliged to take it off almost at once and replace it by the astrachan *kula*, on which had been fastened the diamond aigrette, the symbol of royal power, taken by Nadir Shah from the Emperor of Delhi.

Then the Mulla Sayyid Hamza and His Highness the Sun-of-Poets, the Kajar Prince and Court Poet, advanced in front of the throne. The first recited his *khutba*, as follows :—

In Arabic :

" In the Name of Allah the Merciful, the Forgiving !

" Praise be to Allah, Whose immutable reign endureth forever, Whose ancient Kingdom remaineth unshakeable.

He raiseth up the Princes of Islam, He setteth them up as standards that they may spread abroad His religion and fulfil His commandments."

In Persian verse :

" He Who hath sent perfume to the flower and a soul to the clay hath in His wisdom distributed to each one according to his deserts.

" He hath given to the divine throne the loftiest position and to the carpet the lowest place. For so He hath seen fit and just."

In Persian Prose :

" In this moment, this dawn of happiness, He hath adorned the throne and the Imperial crown with the presence of a Cyrus whose justice hath torn the picture of iniquity from the page of the world."

In Persian verse :

" A sovereign hath ascended the throne of Jam whose refuge is in Mohammed and in Ali."

In Arabic :

" It is he who, through his merit, is the Sultan of Islam. Fame has spread abroad the beauty of his character. He is the Protector of the countries of the Faith ; it is he who wipes out the traces of disobedience and rebellion, he of whom it is said, ' Verily, Allah commandeth justice and beneficence.' He is the Sultan, son of the Sultan, son of the Sultan, the Khakan, son of the Khakan, son of the Khakan—the Sultan Mohammed Ali Shah, Kajar (may the pillars of his kingdom rest eternally on the foundations of justice ! May the pulpits of Islam resound forever with the *khutbas* uttered on behalf of his reign !)."

His voice had risen in the crescendo of Sultans and Khakans, and filled the hall with the name of His New Majesty, every syllable of which the audience acknowledged with a low bow. The Viziers of Ceremonies, with their wands of enamelled gold, surmounted by huge rounded emeralds, advanced towards the throne, followed by their staff, bent to the ground, retired three paces, and then bowed again. These gymnastics of adoration went on during the whole of the *khutba*, and continued through the *kasida* in Persian verse, which was now recited by the Sun-of-Poets.

" In the Name of Allah (may His glorious state be exalted).

" What gladness there is in the joyful solemnity of *Imruz* (to-day).

" Allah has given a support to the world *Imruz !*

" The good news comes down from Heaven to men : Mohammed Ali is King from the East to the West *Imruz !*

" If you have never seen the supernatural light shining on the mountain of Sinai, admire this divine splendour on the throne *Imruz !*

" On the throne and on the crown of the Shahs. It is the Imperial glory that increases the brilliance of the moon and of the sun *Imruz !*

" Let all the stars of Heaven prostrate themselves, inclining their foreheads before the Throne and the Crown of the Kayanians *Imruz !*

" Behold a sovereign whose justice would prevent even the eagle from casting his eyes on the partridge *Imruz !*

" He is the sublime potentate, the Shah glorious as Faridun, whose equity watches over the people and secures justice unto them *Imruz !*

" Mahomet and Ali are his protectors, Providence is his helper, for it is he who has become the refuge of all men, *Imruz !*

" I am but a humble servant ; the honour, high as the sun in the firmament, of uttering the praises of the Shah at the foot of his Imperial throne falls to me *Imruz !* "

The Shah accepted this divine worship as his due, with an indifferent, almost bored, look. Then he descended the steps of the throne and addressed a few words to the Foreign Representatives. I heard him say, through his interpreter, to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, how much he had been charmed by the personal telegram from the King of England, which he had received that very morning. The English and Russian Ministers conveyed to him the congratulations of their sovereigns upon the nomination of Sultan Ahmad Mirza as Heir-Apparent. With our Minister he merely asked after the President of the Republic. He speaks French quite fluently, but on official occasions he prefers to use as interpreter one of the sons of the Grand Vizier, a former pupil of the École Polytechnique in France.

When His Majesty had left the hall, followed by his sons and some of the high officials, conversation became general as the assembly dispersed. I passed close to Isfandiar, who was talking with someone in state attire, a tall man of a fine Persian type. On seeing me, he stopped and introduced me. It was the Shah's uncle, Prince Harun-ar-Rashid.

CHAPTER XI

AT ZARGANDA

Friday, March 15th.

WE have jumped suddenly into spring since yesterday. Officially, the vernal season does not commence until Thursday next, but the sun has forestalled the date, and is already quite powerfully warm. Were it not that the vegetation is scarcely budding as yet, it would be like May in Normandy.

Isfandiar called this afternoon at three o'clock at the Legation, according to our arrangement of yesterday, to take me to Zarganda, in search of a country house—called here simply *Bagh*, i.e. "garden"—for the summer. Mansur had brought round my horse, and he accompanied us, together with Isfandiar's man Ahmad.

We left the town directly through the Ashratabad Gate, to the north of the Legation, and rode across country in the direction of the mountains, which lay before us like a giant wall, the impassable rampart of a Jinn citadel. Their snowy mantle sparkled in the brilliant sunshine, and their jagged summits seemed to pierce right through the pale blue vault of a virgin heaven, where a single white and filmy cloud crowned, turban-wise, the majestic brow of the Demavend, the lofty Shah of this kingdom of mountains. The air had regained its incomparable purity, the atmosphere its unique translucence and limpidity, now that the first suns of March had dissipated the mists of winter.

It was good to be galloping madly along, filling one's lungs with mighty draughts of the exhalations of re-awakening life, good to intoxicate oneself with air and the sense of springtime, to revel to the full in the joy of living.

The magic of this call of Nature roused in Isfandiar everything that was Bakhtiyari, savage and primitive, and all at once, striking his spurs deep into the flanks of his charger, he shot forward at full speed. Standing up rigid in his stirrups, as if unconscious of any motion, he swung his sword out into the air, at arm's length, his sleeve fluttering, a white ensign, on the wind, then, like a flash, he disappeared in the cloud of dust struck up by his horse's hoofs. A long, wild cry rose on the stillness, the war-cry, doubtless, of his tribe, since it was promptly answered by Ahmad, forgetful of all conventions, and ere long I saw him return at the same flying pace, his sword pointed in front, and his horse's head set towards that of my own beast. At a distance of some three paces he suddenly pulled up short, and sent my forage cap rolling in the dust with one blow from the flat of his weapon. I cannot say that, at the moment, I appreciated all the excellence of this feat—I was too much startled to speak, and he went off into fits of laughter at my astonishment. His eyes shone with an unaccustomed brilliancy. "Ah! if only we were in my country!" he exclaimed. "There, indeed, one really *lives!*" And his gaze grew far away, with a sudden silence.

We had dropped into a foot's pace; Ahmad and Mansur followed at a little distance, their talk appearing eager and animated. My thoughts turned dreamily to the delights of living the simple life in that land of beauty, among the Bakhtiyari mountains, and I could picture myself already there in some emerald vale, where, as I returned from the hunt with my men, to a little hut of

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reeds and branches, Bibi Mâh, my sweet Bibi Mâh, smiling and not veiled there, should spring to greet with joyous cries of "*Afarin!*" the spoils of my chase, a mighty lion of my own killing, swung by its feet from a slender pole.

Our horses whinnied joyously, and plunged forward, racing madly up every little hill in the uneven track.

Between the arid mountains a smiling valley opened green before us, a veritable oasis in the midst of the yellow-grey desolation of its surroundings, above which, in the blue, floated immense birds of prey. From time to time the view was hidden, as the dust-clouds were lifted in a whirlwind that widened as it rose, to flee phantom-like before us. On our right the road to Shimran stretched its curtain of budding poplar saplings, merging in the distance into the great trees and massive buildings of Kassar-i-Kajar. Turning to Isfandiar, I asked him whether all this wild beauty did not remind him of his own country.

"No!" he replied, "it is greener there and more fertile; the hills are covered with oaks and elms and walnut trees, while in the valleys, where the brooks sing their way under the shade of willow or poplar, the vines and hops and maples and almonds and wild figs share the soil with hawthorns and wild roses. Ah! if you only knew! . . . "

His words awoke an echo in my own breast, and conjured up the memory of another land than this, and so we fell into a homesick dreaming that damped our late exuberant gaiety, our pace insensibly slackening, as if our steeds responded to our mood.

But we found presently that we must hasten on, for there was no time to lose. Zarganda is about seven miles from Teheran, the afternoon was advancing, and it would take us all the remainder to inspect the two or three

Gardens which had been recommended to our notice. So we put our horses to a steady trot, such as they could keep up indefinitely without fatigue, and struck into the Shimran road—a poor enough "road," according to Western notions, but still accessible, even for carriages.

Passing Gulahak, the summer quarters of the British Legation, set in a frame of barley fields growing green in the sun, we cut across to the left, to the banks of a torrent whose bed, generally dry, was now, owing to the melting snow on the heights, overflowing with foamy water. Isfandiar was just setting his horse to ford the stream when a warning cry from a peasant at some little distance stopped him. The crossing was apparently dangerous, and we were forced to retrace our steps and go over by the bridge that lay higher up.

On the other side, close to a *hammam* with mud cupola, we came upon a group of country-folk seated outside a tea-house. Isfandiar enquired of them the way, and one man volunteered to guide us through the little village, whose tree-bordered roads meandered confusingly between the gardens, with everywhere the murmur of tiny rivulets of clear spring water.

Under his escort we visited several Gardens, but no one among them awoke in me much enthusiasm or desire. So early in the year this prodigal display of leafless trees, planted in regular rows, these tiny mud pavilions, with scarcely space within them in which to bestow oneself, could hardly be called alluring. I politely declined them all.

As it was getting late, Isfandiar did not press me to go on with him to the Garden, at some distance, which his future father-in-law had lent him for the summer, and where he was to spend his honeymoon. Without knowing why, I fancied, somehow, that he preferred going there alone, so I left him to do so, and started back to Teheran

with Mansur. As we were once more passing the tea-house one of the peasants called out to our guide, " Have you shown the Sahib the garden of the Prince-of-the-Merchants ? "

" No," he replied, " the Sahib would not care for it, it is too large."

" Too large ? Why ? " I enquired, interested.

" Yes, and there are several summer-houses."

" Is it far from here ? " I asked.

The man who had stopped us answered me. " No," he said, " not at all. If you care to come with me, I can show it to you. I am the head gardener."

I caught at the suggestion, and was so delighted with the Garden and its kiosks, that it ended in my instructing him to bring the Prince's agent to see me the following day in Teheran, to arrange the terms of the lease.

We turned homewards again, and during the long ride Mansur unburdened his soul with regard to a project which much occupied him, and for which he sought my sympathy and consent.

It seemed that since the death of his wife some two months before we left Tunis, his loneliness had preyed upon him greatly ; he felt that he could endure his widowerhood no longer, and for a considerable time now he had been contemplating a second marriage. He had no doubt about finding a Sunnite woman for his purpose in Teheran, and since the Persian women are debarred by law from ever leaving their country, it would simply have been a question of divorce later on, at our departure.

And this had been his original plan. But Ahmad had suggested one far better, revealing to him the custom of temporary marriage allowed by Persian law, and he had, moreover, introduced him to a " very nice " Persian, who had been anxious to arrange matters for him. This man had called upon him that very morning, with an old,

bent-up crone, thickly veiled, who had informed him that amongst the *Sighas*—temporary wives—of her acquaintance there was an Abyssinian woman, the very person for him. And she had launched forth into such an alluring description of the "lady," illustrated by comparisons with the moon, the cypress, the gazelle, and the parrot, that his imagination had at length been fired.

She had been bought, it appeared, in Bagdad, by a Turkish merchant, who had recently died in Teheran, thus leaving the poor thing with no other pillow than the stones of the road on which to lay her head. The old woman had taken pity upon her, according to her own account, and had introduced her to a *khanûm*, whose business it was to receive *Sighas* desirous of marriage.

Mansur enquired if the "lady" were young.

"Young!" was the reply. "By your death, if I told you she were born yesterday, you would not believe me. But I can assure you that our Padishah has not many younger in the royal *anderûn!* I take for witness Her Highness, Fatima the Pure, sister of the Imam Reza, that I speak but the truth when I say that she is like the rose in the paradise of sweets, a sugar-eating parrot!"

"I suppose she is white then?"

"*White* is perhaps an exaggeration, although she is known as Nûr Jehan, the Light of the World," answered the matchmaker. "She is not *black*, but the warmth of the sun, as you know, is felt considerably in Abyssinia—my lord is somewhat brown of colour himself—we will put it that she is the same." And to counteract whatever evil impression this admission might have produced, she added hastily, with an eye to the weak spot of an Arab's fancy, "She is as fat as a sheep's tail!"

Mansur gathered that the woman in question was a lady of colour; he had no objection to that, his first wife having been the same, and, indeed, the coloured women

are much better housekeepers than their white sisters, and more docile and reliable, more devoted and affectionate. And, in short, so satisfactory did it all seem, that the matter might well have been ordered beforehand by Destiny. He had decided, therefore, subject to my permission, to marry this *Sigha*. He had some idea already as to the amount of dowry required, and he had saved sufficient money to allow of his having a most respectable wedding, and of his afterwards installing his bride in a little house of their own.

He recounted all this with great eloquence, and so determined did he seem upon the plan that I did not like to offer any real objection to it. He knew nothing of the woman's antecedents, it is true, nor even whether she would actually please him, but then, this one or another, under the laws of Islam is there ever any knowledge before marriage ? And, in any case, what, after all, was a temporary marriage ?

And to think that *I*, an Infidel, should have *seen* a Mohammedan woman—whom yet I shall never marry—even temporarily !

CHAPTER XII

TEMPORARY MARRIAGE

'TWAS no sooner said than done. Mansur lost no unnecessary time after gaining my permission, and two days later the fatal step was taken.

A temporary marriage can be arranged, and the knot tied, almost at a moment's notice, and it is indeed a case of " marry in haste," without much fear of an aftermath of repentant leisure. Many Persian travellers resort to this form of union to soften the loneliness of life away from home. Others do so because their fiancées are not, as yet, of marriageable age, or to vary the monotony of the harem, or because their real wives are temporarily invalided.

I learnt a good deal about the subject in a conversation with Mulla Ibrahim, whom I met the other day in the Booksellers' Bazar. He sought to prove to me the extreme morality of the temporary marriage, by assuring me that if the custom were adopted in France, we should no longer have to blush for the presence amongst us of the cocotte ; such creatures, being no longer required, would, *ipso facto*, cease to exist. The Shah's visits to Europe have certainly opened the eyes of his subjects.

" Do you mean to imply," I asked, " that these *Sighas* are the cocottes of Persia ? "

" By no means," replied the holy man, " for the simple reason that these unions are legalised by the presence at the ceremony of a mulla. Mahomet—may his name be exalted !—sanctioned them originally for the use of the

soldiery during his campaigns. It is only that accursed Omar, in this, as in other matters, running counter to the instructions of the Prophet, who forbade them to the Sunnites. But—*Al-hamdullah !* (praise be to Allah !) —*we* are Shiites.

" Moreover," he went on, " the custom of temporary marriage is as old as the world itself—I should not be surprised to learn that any of the sons of the Prophet Noah had made use of it—at all events, it is certain that our hero, the elephantine and mighty Rustam, whilst on a hunting expedition in the neighbourhood of Turan, contracted a union of this nature with Tamina, the daughter of the King of Samengan—

> A moon-faced beauty rose upon his sight,
> Like the Sun sparkling, full of bloom and fragrance ;
> Her ringlets fateful as the warrior's kamund,
> And graceful as the lofty cypress. . . .

Mulla Ibrahim stopped for a moment, smacking his lips over the poetry as if he had tasted honey, then he went on :

" Although it is not mentioned in the Koran, the temporary marriage is absolutely legal from the religious point of view. For its validity the law requires four conditions to be complied with :

" Firstly, there must be a contract, drawn up by a man of law, a mulla, and it is this contract to which, in reality, the term *Sigha* applies, although the name in ordinary use has come to indicate the *object* of the contract, the temporary wife herself.

" Secondly, the woman must be a believer in one of the revealed religions, that is to say, she must be either a Moslem, a Christian, or a Jewess, or she may be a Parsee, although certain purists object to the inclusion of the last-named creed. In event of the husband having been

deceived on this point, so as inadvertently to have taken up with a heathen woman, the marriage still holds good, but he is obliged to see that during the period of their union she does not partake of any wine or other forbidden article of diet, such as pork, hare, crustaceans, and so forth, considered unclean by true believers.

" The third condition concerns the dowry, which must be formed of substance capable of being weighed or measured, as ingots of gold, precious stones, phials of perfume, sacks of corn, anything, in short, of a like nature which the *Sigha* is willing to accept, even down to a handful of flour, and of whatever its component parts, they must be particularised in the contract. Should the man, who alone can dissolve this union, decide to break with the woman before the expiration of half the term agreed upon, then he is obliged to pay the *Sigha* half the amount specified of the dowry ; if this period is exceeded when they part, he must pay the amount in full.

" In the fourth condition, the duration of the marriage is stipulated, and this may be any period, from one hour to ninety-nine years, the contracting parties having the option of renewal, should they desire it, at the end of the term agreed upon. On the termination of the union the woman has not the right to remarry before the expiration of forty-five days, or two months—this lapse of time deciding whether or no she has expectations of becoming a mother—in which case she is debarred from remarriage for a period of four lunar months and ten days.

" Our holy religion," added the mulla, with an upward glance of pious gratitude, " is ever mindful of the little ones, and hence the issue of these temporary unions have the same standing, legally, as those of the permanent marriages. Praised be Allah ! "

Mirza Jafar, who does not profess any particular

admiration for the laws of his country, and who has, moreover, an intense dislike for priests, remarked later, when we were alone : " The holy man omitted one point in speaking of the forty-five days during which the *Sighas* may not remarry."

" Oh ? " I asked, " and what was that ? "

" Well," he replied, " that condition is only applicable in cases in which the marriage has actually been consummated. But many of these women may be said to *follow the profession* of *Sigha*, with the connivance, for a pecuniary consideration, of the officiating mullas, and since this period of probation is prejudicial to their sinful traffic, the Mullas have discovered a way of evading the law. When the stipulated term of union has expired, the woman manages to persuade the man to renew it for a very short period. This second marriage is, of course, legal without any time of probation, the contracting parties being the same, whilst, on the other hand, since it is purely nominal, there is nothing to prevent the *Sigha* from entering, at its expiration, into a fresh arrangement with another man at once, or so soon as she can find one to do so. And this is how our priests would interpret the holy Law ! " His lip curled scornfully.

" Another thing," he went on, after a pause, " as our Law forbids divorce between the parties to a temporary union, it sometimes happens that the *Akdis*—legitimate wives—have recourse to the *Sigha* contract, with a maximum time limit, in order to ensure the permanence of their union.

" The mullas may say what they like in favour of temporary marriage, but, personally, I am not prejudiced in its favour. It has its good side, of course, but there is a bad side also, as you would agree, if you were to enquire into its results in such places as the provinces of Ghïlan and Mazanderan, where the peasant labourers,

every rice harvest, contract this sort of union with such women as they may need to help them with their work, abandoning them at the end of the time, to remarry in the same way the next year—probably with a different woman ! "

. . . . .

With the assistance of Ahmad and the " very nice " man, Mansur—to whom the Sunnite prohibition mattered but little—had soon completed all the necessary preparations. First there was a little house to be found, in which to lodge his future bride ; then it had to be furnished. Some felt carpets, chests for their linen and other possessions, a few pots and pans, a *samovar*, some plates and bowls and cups, were all that was demanded. Nur Jehan brought with her her modest trousseau, and her bed, rolled up in a piece of cloth.

Then the bridegroom ordered from the neighbouring bazar *pilaws*, roast *kebabs*, and a quantity of *shirini*, or sweetmeats, for the wedding feast, and he ended his day's exertions in the *hammam*, in company with Ahmad and the " very nice " Persian, who was to act as the bride's *Vakil*, i.e. witness or representative. As each of the " high contracting parties " has to be supported by a *Vakil*, Mansur had charged Ahmad with this office on his own behalf, and it was in the *hammam*, to the accompaniment of tea and *kalyans*, that the two *Vakils* discussed the terms of the contract, and came to an understanding as to the dowry, their task being considerably lightened by the fact that everything had already been practically arranged.

The next morning Ahmad and the Persian met at the house of the old go-between beldame, whither, also, a mulla had been summoned.

The *Vakils* seated themselves on the ground on either side of the priest, who drew from his sash a roll of paper

and his *Kalamdan*, and began silently cutting off a sheet of the paper and trimming his *kalam*. The old woman, meanwhile, disappeared into an adjoining chamber in search of Nur Jehan, whose veiled and *chadured* form presented the appearance of a dark, shapeless balloon.

Then the mulla, having questioned the *Vakils* as to the amount of the dowry and the duration of the union, proceeded, with great solemnity, to inscribe on the paper, in his best handwriting, the terms of the contract, after which the "very nice" Persian, addressing Ahmad, asked him: "Do you consent to give me your soul upon the aforesaid conditions?" "Yes, by my eye!" was the reply, and the mulla affixed his seal and those of the *Vakils* to the contract, which he presented to Nur Jehan.

Salaams and congratulations were then exchanged, and the three men went off to the little house, where Mansur was awaiting them with a few friends. The mulla took the bridegroom aside for a moment or two, and then, having received his present, he departed, leaving the company to their feasting.

They all seated themselves on the floor round a table-cloth spread with steaming dishes and *shirini*, whilst two musicians and a singer filled the air with weird cadences. The feast lasted on until the night, the guests retiring discreetly as two closely shrouded phantoms entered softly, the old woman and Nur Jehan, the "Light of the World," who was to illuminate with a fresh brilliance the life of the widowed Mansur.

CHAPTER XIII

SAYYID JAMAL-UD-DIN

"*AL-HAMDULLAH!*" cried Mirza Jafar, "you will at last be able to hear a sermon from the sublime Agha Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din!"

And he proceeded to explain that this celebrated preacher, at the urgent request of his followers, whose numbers far overflowed his accustomed mosque, would address them that afternoon on the Sabz-i-Maydan, and it would be quite possible for us to form part of his audience without, at the same time, coming in contact with the crowd, which might very possibly resent the intrusion of an Infidel. His friend, the tobacconist, was willing to admit us to the roof of his bazar, and from thence we should be able to hear everything perfectly.

I was extremely gratified by this news: to hear a sermon by a *mujtahid*, one of the heads of the Persian clergy, a descendant of the Prophet himself, was a unique privilege, and the more so in this case since this particular holy personage was, according to his own expression, "the first Mussulman preacher who had preached Liberty to the congregation of the Faithful."

We lost no time in setting out for the Sabz-i-Maydan—the Green Square—reaching the Tobacco Bazar by a circuitous route to avoid the crowd, and the worthy merchant led us up on to the terrace, where the company, although considerable, was select and sufficiently well-

THE SERMON IN THE MOSQUE

(PHOTO BY PRINCE ABDULLAH MIRZA)

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educated to conceal any resentment they might feel at the presence of a Frank like myself.

Below us the Maydan literally swarmed with the Faithful; *kulas* of astrachan jostled *kulas* of khaki felt, with here and there a fleck of colour, white or blue or green, marking out the wearer of a turban, whilst on the edges of the crowd the groups of women formed a sombre outline.

In front of the beautiful pointed doorway which, like a triumphal arch, forms the entrance to the bazar, was placed a pulpit, a wooden arm-chair raised on three or four steps.

All at once the crowd parted, and disclosed the figure of the Sayyid, whom I recognised from the glimpse I had had of him in the Booksellers' Bazar. He walked slowly, with dignity, and yet with humility, of the exaggerated type affected by the higher Persian clergy. An ample black *aba* hung from his shoulders to the ground, and his ascetic features were surmounted by an enormous dark blue turban. He was received by all with profound salutations, and some even drew near to kiss his hands or the skirts of his robe.

He mounted the pulpit amidst a murmur of respectful approbation, and lifting his head towards Heaven, his hands raised, palms upwards, to the height of his shoulders, he began the invocation:

"*Bismillah er-Rahman, er-Rahim, Rabb-al-Alamin!*"

(In the Name of God, the Clement, the Merciful, Master of the Worlds!)

Then he gazed around him, smiling, passed his delicate hand over his face, and spoke in these words, which, thanks to the assistance of Mirza Jafar, I have been able faithfully to transcribe:—

"I have said to you, O men, that the principle of progress and of prosperity, of wealth and of power, of well-being in this world and of salvation in the next, dependeth

upon four essentials. Every country, every nation that possesseth these four essentials advanceth along the way of progress, and riseth from the obscure deeps of profound darkness to the loftiest and most resplendent heights of light. Every nation, on the other hand, in which these four essentials may not be found, every country which lacketh be it but one of them, possessing indeed the other three, endureth a condition of ruin and desolation such as we behold around us in Persia at this moment. Its people are in poverty, in weakness, and in ignorance. It is the lack of these four essentials that rendereth man ignorant and incapable, it is this that conduceth to his poverty and wretchedness, and in this state it is that he seeketh no more after anything, neither laboureth any more with his hands, nor hath in his heart any desire but that he may be annihilated.

" Know ye, O men, these are the four essentials :

" (1) Equality ; (2) Security ; (3) Liberty ; (4) Art and Science.

" Last night I said unto you that this word ' Equality ' doth not pretend that, for example, I am to sit side by side with the Shah, the Protector of Islam ; it doth not pretend that the soldier is to be equipped as the general ; it doth not pretend that ye shall no longer respect nor kiss the hands of ulamas. To believe thus would be to err profoundly. And similarly with the word ' Liberty,' which some would turn from its primary meaning, and which I will, if it please Allah, explain unto you in its proper sequence.

" But this is the meaning of the word ' Equality ' : the laws of God shall be applied in an equal manner to every unit of the nation, that is to say, whosoever stealeth shall lose his hand ; whosoever partaketh of wine shall receive chastisement ; whosoever hath property liable to tribute shall pay the tribute levied thereon ! "

Here Mirza Jafar murmured in my ear, " It costs him nothing to say that, because the property of priests is exempt from taxation ! "

" Whosoever it may be," went on the Sayyid, " without excuse or exception, for in the Koran and in the Hadith is no difference made between the Shah and the beggar. The Koran saith, ' Be exact in fulfilling your prayers ! ' This command is addressed to all, and concerns each one of us. No man can say, ' I am a Sayyid, and therefore I am exempt from prayer ! ' Or again, ' I am a witness in Islam,' or ' I am a prince ! ' Prayer bindeth on all, save only such as are explicitly exempted by the Law, as, for example, a woman at the period of her menstruation. Whosoever a woman may be, if she prostitute herself, she shall fall into Hell-fire, unless it be that she repenteth. Therefore see we that ' Equality ' intendeth ' The Ordinance of God is the same for all men.'

" O Men ! The God Who should make distinctions between His creatures would not be God ; the Law that included not all beneath its rule, both high and low, would not be law ! God hath said, ' O Men, fasting is ordained for you ! ' and thenceforth each one, no matter who he be, is bound to fast—man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, with the exception of such as are exempt, as the sick, or he who maketh a journey. What difference can there be between thee when ill and me when ill ? And thus it is also with obligatory almsgiving, with pilgrimages, with the Holy War : this, then, is the meaning of the word ' Equality.'

" Here in our land of Persia this law holdeth not to-day. I say not that it hath lapsed for this year only ; it holdeth not in this present year, for that it held not in the year before this, neither did it so ten years previously, or even a hundred years. And herein is the reason wherefore we grow daily poorer and poorer, and become

each day more and more miserable, more and more wretched ! "

Here Agha Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din paused, and murmurs of " *Barik - Allah !* " " *Mash - Allah !* " (" Praise to Allah ! ") came from all round ; a movement as of a billow swept over the vast assembly, little groups of critics gathered here and there, commenting on the words of the Descendant of the Prophet, all applauding his utterances, and delighting in the vistas opened up by them to their fertile Eastern imaginations.

The Sayyid had assumed his aerial chair, and was slowly stroking the end of his beard, tinted with henna and *rang ;* his small, piercing eyes shone in their deep sockets like stars reflected at the bottom of a well ; a frozen smile curled, somewhat sardonically, his sensual mouth, which a moustache, cut straight above the lips, shadowed with a black line, drooping at the corners. And behind him the blue faïence of the portal shone in the sunlight like an aureole.

He continued :

" Philosophers and scholars have drawn their wisdom from the prophets ; all that we have, therefore, comes to us from the prophets. Neither have these invented anything of themselves, all that they have taught us they have obtained from God.

" Our feeble intellect can determine nothing by its own calculations ! "

And he pointed his phrase by that argument so supreme to the Persian mind, a quotation from the poets :—

> It but admits what Science first hath shown ;
> All Art, be sure, is Inspiration-born,
> For this comes first—with Intellect as crown.

" Astronomy, medicine, these are gifts brought to us through the revelations of the prophets. Of what use is

intellect, of what use feeling in that which is without form ?

> It needs but little wit to dig a grave,
> With this what part can Thought or Science have ?

" Had God not said, ' Bury ye your dead ! ' we should not have known what we were to do with them, even as Cabil (Cain), who for long knew not what he should do with the body of Abil (Abel). God it was Who instructed him in the rites of burial. Had the prophets not said, ' Wash ye your linen ! ' we should not have known the necessity for so doing. In short, all our knowledge cometh from the prophets, who received it themselves of God.

" ' Neither doth he speak of his own will. It is no other than a revelation which hath been revealed unto him.'

" God speaketh in allegories ; that is to say, when He would bring to our intelligence that which hath been hidden therefrom, He revealeth it unto us after the manner of a parable, so that both I and thou may understand. If, for example, He desireth us to understand the perishable nature of this present world, He embodieth His thought in metaphor, comparing the world unto a spider's web. As thus : ' But the weakest of all houses surely is the house of the spider,' by which we must understand that this world is as fragile as a spider's web.

" His Highness Jesus, in the Gospels, hath made great use of apologues, as hath Moses in his books, and again, God, in the Koran. ' Moreover, God will not be ashamed to propound in a parable a gnat. . . . '

" I speak openly that all may understand.

" Neither is this an evil work, seeing that it is the work of the Prophet.

" When one has to do with children, one must speak the language of childhood.

" God Himself is the first to employ the allegory as a channel for knowledge, and to elaborate this point would carry us too far. Doth He not say, for instance :

" ' Verily, the idols which ye invoke beside God can never create a single fly, although they were all assembled for that purpose ; and if the fly snatch anything from them, they cannot recover the same from it ' ?

" God here desireth to show us that idolatry is evil, and it is by this parable that He thus instructeth us. In the second half of this verse we have an allusion to the custom of the ancient idolaters of that time of anointing their idols with must [unfermented wine], this must being subsequently collected in vessels and used for affections of the throat and other maladies, upon which must the flies were wont to settle.

" It is said that a certain Arab, possessing an idol, went forth one day upon his business. On his return he beheld a fox defiling this idol. Then cried he aloud and said, ' Is this a God to be worshipped, whose head can thus be defiled by foxes ? '

" And this is an example which may yet serve in our day, which may serve, above all, for those—and I ask pardon of God for that which I am about to say—for those who abandon the religion of the Amir of the Faithful, His Highness Ali, and become Babis ; Allah Akbar ! Forgive me ! These are so far demented as to imagine that a man can become God. By my most holy ancestor the Prophet, these men are worse than the ungodly in the days of ignorance ! Go to, do ye imagine that mere flesh and blood, born of woman as are we, suffering hunger, weariness, the need of clothing, as do we, subject to maladies, obliged to submit like any other to the ministrations of the apothecary, do ye think, I say, that such an one can become God ? "

There were shouts of " No ! no ! " and " Blasphemy ! "

from the crowd. Mirza Jafar, beside me, grew pale. In this great concourse of people there were, doubtless, as I knew, a considerable number of Babis—there are said to be some thirty thousand in Teheran—and I suspected myself that these indignant protestations came chiefly from them, for since the cruel persecutions to which they have been subjected they hide their real religious convictions, like the Sufis of old, behind a skilful *katman*.

" In short," continued Jamal-ud-Din, " these parables which we have in the Koran, and which have been much added to by the philosophers, have all been written in the ways of wisdom. Grave doctrines have been clothed in the garments of fable, so that all may imbibe them with pleasure. The earliest writers of allegory among men were the philosophers of India.

" Three gifts have we received from India. The first is the game of chess, whereby men learn to conquer kingdoms by means of strategy, and which is, on this account, of the greatest value to kings. It accustometh a man to consider well his moves, and whereby he may best achieve those which shall ultimately follow. But this game, in the eyes of our religious law, is forbidden.

" The second gift is the science of mathematics. The Indians it was who invented the nine numerical symbols whereby we are enabled to inscribe millions of numbers, the addition of a zero sufficing to mark enormous differences in value.

" The third gift is that of the Story-books, books, that is to say, wherein the problems of wisdom are clad in the garments of anecdote, so that even children, even women read them with eagerness. The best of these story-books is that of Kalila and Dimnah, the translation whereof is Anvari Sohaili, a work of such great excellence that it hath been given in all the tongues of the world. We owe the Persian version to King Anuchirvan, who at great

expense imported the book from India and caused it to be translated into our tongue.

" After the Indian philosophers, we find that the Franks, with their usual perfection of attainment, have produced many excellent books of this nature, called by them ' Novels '—books of such profound usefulness that I say unto you, take ye them and read them, O ye who have understanding of the Frankish tongues !

" Verily, I know not yet whether the peoples of Europe have attained any greater heights of civilisation than this.

" We imagined that in telegraphy science had reached its highest level. Here in Teheran a man moves his hand and lo, the sound thereof re-echoes in Paris. Yet learned we ere long that there was a wonder greater than this, even the telephone. Thou speakest here, and thy voice, *thy* voice, thy own voice is heard at Kasvin. Nor was the end yet, for we behold a still greater marvel, the wireless telegraphy. Thou speakest, and thy words go forth and are recorded in London, without the intervention of either wire or pole ! Yet is it not a bird that serves thee as messenger, neither is it the wind that carries thy saying !

" O men, O men, whence cometh all this ? Know ye, indeed ? Then will I tell it you ! This is the fruit of science !—of science !—of science !—of science !—and science existeth not in Persia ! "

" *Ya Ali ! Amán ! Amán !* " (" O Ali, Mercy ! Mercy ! ") cried some of his hearers, and the Descendant of the Prophet, having gulped down a few mouthfuls of water from an earthen bowl held up to him by a water carrier, went on, amidst the silence and deep attention of the astonished faithful :

" Ah, yes ! we have, on the other hand, a science amongst us which hath made strange progress in our

WHAT YOUNG PERSIA IS COMING TO—THE DREAM OF MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN

(FROM THE "MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN")

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midst—it is the science of 'blackguardism and theft'! To-night thou returnest home in peace unto thine house, thou slumberest, and to-morrow thou art ejected therefrom, for that a man hath forged unto himself proprietary titles and thine house hath been sold unto another! How many such thieves are there not in Teheran! And to what pains do they not go to acquire knowledge, to learn and to apply all the tricks of their trade of robbery!

"The men of the Franks have brought all things unto their proper point of perfection; for instance, medicine. They have invented an instrument whereby the unborn child may be seen in the womb of the mother: whereby, if she be ill, the seat of the mischief may be discovered, the secret of the wound revealed. With this instrument can men behold that which is contained within a box the cover whereof is securely padlocked. And all this cometh by science only—by God, I swear it—science! It is not magic, it is not delusion, it is not miracle.

"Moreover, this same science hath attained unto great heights also in the realm of political economy, and in social questions and matters of government. How often have I not told you that a country which hath two thousand millions of taxes sees to their payment through its subjects themselves, and should a collector desire to appropriate one single *toman* of all these mighty sums, it would immediately be discovered, and that because of the height whereunto science hath been brought by the Franks."

"*Ajab!* Astonishment! Marvel!" cried the crowd, finger on lip, in token of admiration.

But the preacher, with a brusque movement, as if to check these sentiments towards Europe, went on at once:

"And now that we have a deliberative national

Majlis, this is not in order that we may adopt the laws of Infidels, *Al-Hamdullah! we have the best laws in the world, since to us belongeth the Koran!* But what we must borrow from the Franks is their mode of nominating officials, the regulations as to Ministers, their method of levying taxes in such wise that none shall be subjected to violence."

At this moment there was a considerable stir among the crowd at the other side of the maydan; two men of the regiment of the Amir Bahadur Jang, easily recognisable by their attire, coming out of a tea-house, began yelling out—"*Padar Mashruta misuzanim!*" ("We burn the father of the Constitution!") A space cleared before them, as if by magic, the women uttering shrill cries. Their well-known brutality, the long poignards hanging from their belts, and the guns slung over their shoulders, butt-end upwards, inspired a well-merited fear. A few "Bull-Necks" were on the point of attacking them, but a mulla restrained them, fortunately, for Allah alone knows what would have happened had they come to blows. The presence of the Sayyid in the pulpit served to overawe these brutes of soldiers, who left the maydan immediately.

But the incident, rousing as it did the spirit of political hatred, had disturbed the audience. There were angry exclamations on every side. The sun had disappeared behind a dark cloud, the cold became biting.

But Jamal-ud-Din remained unmoved. In a flash he had once more gripped his audience, who, shivering with cold as they were, became again all attention. His voice sounded more ringing, more sonorous than ever, there was in it a note of anger.

"O people of Teheran!" he said, "thank God a thousand thousand times that ye dwell in the capital! The Prophet saith, 'Dwell ye in populous places, that if

YOUNG PERSIA AS IT ACTUALLY IS—THE AWAKENING OF MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN

(FROM THE "MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN")

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one man oppress you ye may carry your complaint unto another.'

" I have sworn by Allah, I swear also by the Imam of Time, I swear it by the holy Koran, I swear it by the Lord of the Confessors of Islam, the matter of the *Majlis* was a work beyond the power of all, and it is the Imam Mahdi who hath accomplished it, by awakening you from the slumber of indifference that I might speak to you as I do from the lofty place of this pulpit !

" O people of Teheran, I have no desire, be assured, to flatter any man, but the development, the progress of this deliberate *Majlis* are due, under the Master of Time, to the efforts of two great Sayyids—both Witnesses and Proofs of Islam ; I mean, Agha Sayyid Mohammed Mujtahid, and Agha Sayyid Abdullah, who have continually cried unto you, ' O men, tyranny is abroad on the earth, set up, therefore, a *Majlis* of Justice ! '

" May Allah advance every mulla who hath come to your assistance, nor thought of himself, nor sought to plunder you that he might live in luxury upon your ruins !

" O men, if it come to your ears that certain traitors, certain wicked ones desire to go against this *Majlis*, have ye no fear ! It will be as I have already told unto you so often ! These men are lower than the mosquitoes, less are they than the mosquitoes of the mosquitoes ! Say ye unto them : ' We must bring prosperity unto our country, we must carry out the commands of God, we must give riches unto you, we desire that there should no longer be so many beggars, men or women, in want and misery by day and night in our streets ! "

" Hear ye a parable ! One day the mosquitoes came before His Highness Sulayman (King Solomon) to complain unto him ; and thus said they : ' O prophet of God, what can we do against the wind which torments and tortures us ? If four of us but meet together, behold the

wind is there also and scattereth us!' And Solomon called, 'O Winds, come hither!'

The wind heard his call, came up with violent raging, strenuous and impetuous,
Whereupon the mosquito straightway took flight.
Then cried Solomon unto him: 'Whither goest thou, O mosquito?
Remain, that I may pronounce judgment between you.'
But the mosquito answered him, 'O King! my death comes, from his life,
And his breath obscures the mirror of my days.
When he appears, how shall I resist him?
Alas, he torments me, and does me to death!'

"Behold, these froward ones are like unto the mosquitoes!

"O men, know ye not the *Majlis* shall bring forth from his tomb the father of the bribes; it shall burn the father of the gaming-houses; none shall have the right any more to issue commands against justice, nor any be henceforth permitted to gather up bank-notes by night that he may bring disturbance unto the city in the morning. *Al-Hamdullah!* we are the Servants of the Law. *Al-Hamdullah!* we are the Servants of Persia. We will unite in our efforts to bring prosperity unto Persia, to guard her from falling into the hands of her enemies. The Shah, the Protector of Islam, is in perfect harmony with the *Majlis*, and more than another he knoweth the fruit and the *kibla* (aim) of this institution. Beware, therefore, lest ye cause him annoyance, and when the *Majlis* shall be firmly established, then will the mosquito go of his own accord!"

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE HILLS

SUMMER has come, and with it that intolerable heat which, as early as the beginning of May, drives everyone out of town to the cooler air of the hills that form the lower spurs of the Elbruz Mountains. And "everyone" enjoys the exodus, too, for, after all, it is more or less going off for the holidays—long holidays of five months' duration! My own particular pleasure in it is, however, tempered with sadness at the thought that for those five months I shall be far away from that terrace where I have spent some such exquisite moments, far away from the Lady-with-the-Velvet-Eyes, who has brightened my Persian night with her moonlight. The periods of eclipse were certainly frequent and prolonged, but this very fact only served to make the luminary, when she did condescend to show herself, appear the more desirable.

Baghir Khan is also in the hills, but nowhere in the neighbourhood of Zarganda, so that there is no hope of my seeing Bibi Mâh, even to the poor extent of distinguishing her amongst the uniform crowd of phantom ladies whom I meet out driving during my long rides.

Apart from this drawback, there is no lack of attractions in this country existence. We rise early to enjoy the freshness of the morning; after lunch comes the siesta, until the sun has diminished in ardour; then there are rides to be taken through the grandest scenery, along

valleys golden with ripening harvest, or across bare rocks that our Persian horses scale with the agility of goats; daring ascents to be made to villages perched like eyries on the very edge of some precipice.

The tension of business is relaxed here, political affairs alone escaping the infection of general drowsiness, for even the most energetic of Europeans is here content to drift, like a water-borne feather, on the tide of *far niente*.

My Garden is ten minutes' walk from that of the Legation, and even less than that from the Envy-of-Paradise—the Garden of Harun-ar-Rashid. This has led to the bettering of my acquaintance with this modern edition of an Arabian Nights' personage. In order to picture him, you must imagine the blending of two extremes: all that is most accomplished, archaic, and refined of an ancient civilisation, enlightened by the opinions of modern times, sometimes superficially, sometimes more profoundly, but with ever the underlying determination to remain always and entirely Persian. This Mohammedan Prince is a combination of a Sufi and a Freethinker, but his devotion to tradition keeps him more or less faithful to the customs of Islam. He still prays from time to time—the genuflexions prescribed by Mahomet are an excellent form of exercise—he attends the mosque at festivals, and causes a sheep to be sacrificed at Kurban Bairam. He loves life and nature with the passion of a pantheist, and his veneration for the past does not lead him to despise the present, to sacrifice which, also, to the uncertainty of a future life would appear to him homicidal. Such "Otherworldliness" is, indeed, one great cause of the decadence of Mohammedan nations.

"Between the terrestrial Yesterday," says he, "and the celestial To-morrow, To-day becomes a suspense, a Pause in the Nothing. Why disturb this Pause by Action? think, my fellow-countrymen, since it is so easy to let it

THE SUMMER HALL OF A PERSIAN PALACE

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just glide by, like limpid water, scarcely ruffled by the breezes of the Past, and gloriously gilded by the rays of the Sun of the Beyond, revealed to men by God through the voice of the Prophets! And thus do they despise Life, which nevertheless is the most beautiful gift of God!"

To him, again, there seems no difference between Good and Evil, since God is the Author of all human actions.

As to religions, he believes they are all equally good and bad: they lead man towards Death by ways more or less complex; but, he adds also, "The Prophets have given to men, for their mutual destruction, philosophic arms far sharper than scimitars, and more piercing than poignards."

In those moments when the atavism of religiosity prevails over his philosophies, he evokes the vision of the World of Similitudes, the World of Doubles, which lies beneath the Heaven of the Moon, and whose inhabitants have immaterial bodies, the duplicates of our material earthly bodies, in the which, at the Resurrection, our souls will take up their abode; a world wherein reign night and day, in accordance with this verse of the Koran: "Their nourishment comes to them night and day." And he loses himself in esoteric speculations, whose meaning is mysterious, doubtless, even for him.

He is one of the few Persians who admire the art and architecture of former times. His palace at Teheran is an exact reproduction of one of the most beautiful edifices built by the Sefavi Shahs at Ispahan, and much of the faïence that adorns it is of the period. But nothing is more enchanting than his Sanctuary of Books, which enshrines one of the most valuable libraries in the country. In his hours of inspiration he is quite a poet himself, and his *ghazels* will, doubtless, be handed down to posterity.

He has held offices at Court, and has been Governor of

several provinces, and Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah wished at one time to send him on an embassy to Europe. At present his Liberal views have led to a disgrace which troubles him the less, in that it serves to keep him aloof from Mohammed Ali and his entourage, whom he despises. And yet he is the Shah's uncle, through his wife, a sister of the late monarch.

His considerable fortune permits of his living the life of an independent satrap, surrounded by every species of Oriental luxury. His favourite pastimes are poetry, music, hawking, and hashish, and for the conversion of his friends to these delights he displays a truly missionary zeal. He had an easy conquest in me, so far as the first three were concerned, for I was already a convert, but in my fear lest I should take an equal pleasure in hashish, the intoxicating joys of which I had so often heard vaunted, I resisted him boldly over that, until the day when he tricked me into smoking it unwittingly.

It happened one warm and starlit evening, as we were sitting in the garden together, the languorous air heavy with the perfume of roses. The musicians had departed, leaving song to the nightingales in the plane trees. A servant handed me a *kalyan*, I took it, and after several pulls at it, felt a burning sensation in my throat. Coughing, I handed back the pipe, which was then passed on to the Prince, and returned to me in the usual way, for a fresh smoke. The same sensation followed, with the same cough.

" This tobacco is so strong ! " I said, " and so acrid ! "

" Yes," assented the Prince, " but when you get accustomed to it you'll like it better than any other ; so don't let yourself be put off by a first impression." And as he pressed me to continue smoking, I victimised myself out of politeness.

The air grew heavier, the scent of the roses more fragrant, more penetrating. Never had the nightingales sung

so melodiously; when they ceased, the crystalline sound of running water rang in my ears, sweet as the caress of a houri.

A boy, anticipating my wishes, brought me cushions softer than clouds; I sank into them, and found in repose a perfect happiness, devoid of all desires. Through the leafage the stars gazed down on me lovingly, and seemed to draw quite close to me, so close that I could have seized them, had it seemed worth while to move my arms. The voice of Harun, coming from out the depths of some crystal cavern, murmured to me things pleasant, witty, and delightful—why trouble to reply? My lips were reposing indolently upon each other! Their rest was disturbed, however, by the cool edge of a goblet, which, of its own accord, came and poised upon one of them, like a butterfly on a flower, and I quaffed ambrosia, or some other Olympian draught, whose name mattered little to the thirst it quenched.

A cigarette replaced the goblet in the embrace of my lips, and ignited, unaided—doubtless at the fire of the boldest of the stars. . . . And thus the enchantment continued, into an indefinite eternity!

When I awoke the next morning in my bed, with a heavy head, a throat on fire, and a parched mouth, I realised that I had experienced the joys of hashish!

. . . . .

Shall I mention any political news in this heat? The end of the rebellion of Salar-ud-Dowla, the Shah's youngest brother; the *Jashn-i-Milli*, the national festival, in honour of the Anniversary of the Constitution, celebrated with great splendour at Teheran by more than a hundred thousand people, the success of which was complete, in spite of the Shah and the Palace clique; the Turkish incursions into Azarbayjan; the reactionary propaganda

of Shaykh Fazl-Ullah, and of his jackals Mulla Ibrahim and Baghir; the assassination of Amin-us-Sultan, the Russophile Grand Vizier, lately returned to Persia, after several years' exile, to assist Mohammed Ali to regain his power by his masterfulness in government. His death was celebrated by the Liberals as a public benefaction, and Abbas Agha of Tabriz, who assassinated him and then committed suicide, was declared a national hero and placed on the roll of the martyrs of Liberty. Post cards of him are on sale everywhere, showing him in all sorts of positions, alive and dead. For it must not be forgotten that the picture post card has made its appearance in Persia, and that it plays its part in the Revolution. And how shall I omit to praise the excellent legislative work of the *Majlis*, which is actively engaged on the Supplementary Laws to the original Fundamental Laws of December 30th, 1906? By these additions wholesale liberty will be proclaimed; individual liberty, liberty of teaching, of the Press, of associations, the inviolability of the home, equality before the law, and many other aspects of Liberty no less admirable. It is like a dream!

I must also just mention the fête in the Cossack Camp, to which all the Corps Diplomatique was invited to go, to applaud the feats of horsemanship of the bodies of cavalry commanded by Colonel Liakoff. They are not, as might be supposed, a Russian regiment; the name comes from the uniform, which is identical with that of the Russian Cossacks. They are recruited from the turbulent and warlike nomad tribes of the Shah Sevan, whose chief strongholds are in the mountains of Azarbayjan, not far from Ardebil. This corps forms a brigade of about two thousand horse, divided into four regiments, to whom have been added recently two batteries of field artillery. Russian officers, specially selected from the Caucasian regiments, instruct and command it. It is the

A PERSIAN COSSACK

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only body of troops which is regularly paid and which has some military value.

Such is the sole attempt at civilisation on the part of Russia in Persia, and even this may be looked upon as a scarcely disinterested endeavour after "*penetration pacifique . . . militaire*"; the loans subscribed by this country upon two occasions were destined—once the English loan had been paid off—rather to incite the Shah to extravagance than to assist the empire. And, indeed, the clause by which Persia engaged not to construct any railroads until 1910 was not exactly inserted to facilitate the exploitation of the wealth of the country!

"No!" said the pessimistic Vecquincourt, lately, referring to these matters, "Russia has not attempted to cure the Sick Man of the Middle East, she has been content rather to administer to him drugs prejudicial to his health, and if England does not take care, the rotten fruit will fall into the Muscovite hand!"

But England has just proved that she is taking care. Her skilful diplomacy has conceived and realised the Anglo-Russian Convention, thanks to which the two whilom enemies now walk hand in hand. Spheres of influence have been demarcated—Russia having the largest part—and a policy of non-intervention has been drawn up, together with a promise not to violate the integrity and independence of Persia.

This is the most far-reaching event of the season, interpreted very differently by the Europeans and by the Persians. We think that this Anglo-Russian collaboration, which would once upon a time have seemed so Utopian a scheme, will bring about good results. For my own part, I am naturally inclined, as are many Frenchmen, to admiration of England's doings, and particularly to admiration of the diplomacy of her King—the King of diplomats. The Persians, the Constitutionalists, es-

pecially, are, on the contrary, most unhappy about it. Hitherto, in their misfortunes, they set their hopes on England, who had sustained and helped them in the path of Liberty against Russia, the autocrat, the protector of the Reactionaries. Now they no longer know to which God to pay their vows, and fear to be devoured by those whom they term the Wolves of the North and the Wolves of the South.

Isfandiar cries out indignantly on the subject, paraphrasing a celebrated line of Victor Hugo's :

Bon appétit, Messieurs, *la Perse* vous regarde!"

FINDING REASONS FOR THE CONSTITUTION IN THE KORAN

(FROM "MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN THE PERSIAN "PUNCH")

PART II

FIRST QUARTER

CHAPTER I

THE GAZELLE

October, 1907.

OH ! the look of a dying gazelle !

Ahu is a clever animal, well versed in all the mysteries of her profession as a tame gazelle. The education she received under her donor, Harun-ar-Rashid, was complete, refined, and worthy of a princess among gazelles. Though no family parchment traces her descent, she belongs to a most distinguished and ancient family of the Desert of Arabistan; the chances of life have parted her from her kindred since her earliest youth. Has she kept any recollection of the golden sands of her native land, and of the tall palms, lazily waving in the hot breezes of the Persian Gulf, and shadowing the clear spring in which she saw her young beauty mirrored? Does she ever pine for her lost freedom, or weep for her mother, killed by her captor? She is too well bred to betray her emotion; her profession of a "four-footed odalisque" makes it her duty always to appear affectionate and cheerful to her lord and master.

She knows all the womanly attitudes that call for caresses. She can give the languishing look that disarms the master's anger. She knows the light step, the leaps and gambols that display the grace and litheness of the gazelle. She can show off her beauty, and sit down like a lady for a lump of sugar. She is always elegant, and never fails to smooth her tawny coat and moisten her ebony nostrils with her tongue.

And when she has been naughty, has ravaged a rose-bush, or rolled luxuriously over a tulip-bed, she can creep humbly and imploringly to the feet of her master, ask pardon with streaming eyes, lie like one dead, even before she is beaten, and make her last appeal with the look that poets have sung—the irresistible look of the dying gazelle, which stops the sternest whip in mid-air.

Then, like a woman confident in the power of her beauty, she rises, slowly, with the undulating movement of a dancing girl, and gratefully licks the hand which has not beaten her.

In spite of all her charms, I could not keep Ahu in the house, having nowhere to put her, for I could not think of shutting her up in the stable, or in a room furnished for her, nor could I sacrifice my flowers in order to give her the run of the garden. As Mansur had at his house a courtyard large enough for her to frolic in, I gave him charge of her till next spring ; then she will be sent back to her house at Zarganda.

But the naughty creature thought Mansur's yard unworthy of a gazelle princess, and she slipped out into the neighbouring garden through the watercourse aperture.

The water-supply of Teheran is brought down from the mountain chain of Elbruz by underground watercourses cut through the stony soil, and called *kanáts*. These aqueducts, several miles long, are worth a fortune to their owners, who have laid out large sums in building them, for they ask a high price for the water brought to the town, which is distributed under the supervision of the *Mir-Ab*—the Master-of-the-Waters—of each district. Most of these *kanáts*, though they run underground through the country, become open streams when they reach the city, where they make their way down the middle of the streets, and on each side of the avenues,

A PERSIAN SPORTSMAN TRAPPING A TORTOISE

(FROM A NATIVE PRINT)

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watering the trees as they go. The *Mir-Ab* and his men, with a few handfuls of earth, turn the current through a hole made for the purpose at the bottom of each wall, and it flows into the gardens and cisterns of the subscribers about once a week, according to the means of the owners. The wealthy ones have their private *kanát*, which pours the precious water unceasingly into the fountains of their parks.

It was through one of these watercourse apertures, worn larger by constant use, that Lady Ahu took French leave of Mansur, who was much disgusted at her mysterious disappearance.

After long speculation, he concluded that she could only be in the garden of the house next door ; so, knowing that nobody lived there, he ventured to slip through the hole at the bottom of the wall, along the dry bed of the rivulet, to find her. The garden was very large and rambling, an absolute wilderness, burnt up by the summer sun. Seeing Mansur, the gazelle began to run and frolic, and would not be caught. However, he succeeded in driving her up to the wall at the far end of the garden, and was just about to catch her by the collar with a sudden dash, when the animal eluded his hand, and disappeared again through another exit of the watercourse. Into this Mansur did not dare to follow, as it might be the garden of a harem. He gave up the chase and returned home by the brook.

She came back of her own accord soon after, and she is now allowed the run of the deserted garden.

When I told Yvonne this little story, she surprised me by saying that it was her house to which Ahu had finally gone ; and she showed me as proof a mangled rose-tree.

" It is not strange that so delicate a young person should be fond of roses," said Yvonne. " It could not be otherwise with a true-born Persian."

CHAPTER II

THE MARRIAGE OF ISFANDIAR

THE great event of the past week has been the marriage of Isfandiar, the bride being the only daughter of my neighbour Baghir Khan. The wedding was originally fixed for last spring, but the parents of Zarin Taj Khanum postponed the ceremony as long as possible, in the hope that the new Shah would reconsider the decision of his father, and allow instead that other marriage—with Sayyid Ibrahim—upon which they had set their hearts, both on account of the suitor's high position in the ranks of the Mohammedan clergy, and of his exalted descent from the Prophet himself. Turkan Khatun, Baghir Khan's wife, cherished fond visions of future grandsons in whose veins should run that, to her, most azure of all fluids, the blood of Mahomet, the beloved of Allah. But, unfortunately for her high hopes, His Majesty, far from cancelling them, has lately renewed Muzaffar-ud-Din's commands upon this subject. There has been a good deal of unrest amongst the Bakhtiyari tribes of the mountains, and he had got wind of the intention of their leaders to march upon Ispahan. By uniting Isfandiar Khan, a scion of the house of their most important chieftain, to the great-niece of Amir Bahadur he hoped to bring about a *rapprochement* between the tribes and his own party, and so this marriage, the idea of which had begun to fade out of their minds, came suddenly to the front again as an imminent reality.

Isfandiar himself was a tolerably willing party to this *union politique*, for the beauty of Zarin Taj (Crown-of-Gold) was well known to him, not merely by hearsay, but also from personal inspection, thanks to the connivance of Yvonne. Had his family been resident in Teheran, his mother would probably have found some way of showing him his fiancée, by concealing him in the *anderûn* on a day when the girl was expected there, and the good offices of Yvonne merely supplied the place of that absent maternal duty. Last year, when the marriage was first talked about, Isfandiar, on receiving her congratulations upon the beauty of his prospective bride, her excellent education and upbringing and her general elegance, begged her to contrive for him to see the young girl secretly, on some occasion when she might be visiting her professionally. At first Yvonne refused point-blank. Such a scheme was fraught with danger if it were discovered, and besides, the idea of acting thus as a go-between was utterly abhorrent to her fine nature. But Isfandiar pressed the point so urgently, arguing truly that such "private views" were of most ordinary occurrence in Persia, and appeared so miserable at the idea of being obliged to unite himself for life to a woman who might prove physically antipathetic to him, that in the end she yielded. It was arranged that she should invite Turkan Khatun and her daughter to come in one evening to see some silks newly arrived from Lyons, which, as a special favour, they should see before she took them the following morning to the royal *anderûn*; and that when the eventful evening arrived, Isfandiar should be installed in a small, dark room, only separated from the shop by a glass-panelled door shrouded by a muslin curtain.

It was about eight o'clock, and the assistants had all gone home, when a closed *calèche*, preceded by a mounted

jalowdar, stopped in front of Yvonne's door. Three phantom ladies descended, and were admitted into the private apartments of the house, where tea awaited them before they proceeded into the business premises, for it was Yvonne's custom to receive thus graciously her clients of the higher Persian society, who did not treat her as a mere shopkeeper.

As soon as they had entered the precincts of Yvonne's sanctum, having no fear of the presence of man, they threw back their *ruhbands* and disclosed their faces, framed in the gauze *chargats* like a nun's in her white head-dress, a resemblance still further enhanced by the dark-coloured *chadur* fixed to the head and falling over the shoulders almost to the ground.

After partaking of tea the ladies passed on into the shop, where Yvonne caused her *baji*—maid—to unfold before them the rolls of silk. Isfandiar, in his dark retreat, could see perfectly without being seen, and studied the visitors attentively. The phantom lady of uncertain age, frightfully made-up, and with a loud, shrill voice and somewhat hectoring and authoritative manner, could be no other than Turkan Khatun, a typical mother-in-law; but which of the other two ladies, both young and both equally moon-like in their beauty, was Zarin Taj? He could not tell, and was obliged to scan them both with equal attention, and to learn by heart their features with equal exactitude. The elder appeared to be about seventeen or eighteen, the younger fifteen or sixteen. Their eyes were almost alike, large, dark, and almond-shaped, but those of the elder smouldered languorously, with something of sadness in their depths. Her regular features and colourless complexion also distinguished her from the younger girl, who was all smiles and dimpled carelessness, with mischief and alertness in her arch glances. Isfandiar distinctly preferred this one to the

A PERSIAN WOMAN IN OUTDOOR COSTUME

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other, and strove to reassure himself that this was indeed Zarin Taj by tracing a resemblance between her youthful beauty and the elderly visage of Turkan Khatun. To compare the two was not easy, however, for Yvonne had purposely placed the matron with her back to the glass door, so that the two girls might face the unseen watcher and allow him to study them at his leisure, whilst only the profile of the older woman was visible to him.

Little shrieks of admiration greeted each roll, as its charms were unfolded before the delighted eyes of the ladies, and a babble of excited exclamations and suggestions as to the sartorial possibilities of the shimmering lengths filled the room. When at last they had all been exhibited, and Turkan Khatun was discussing the question of prices with Yvonne, the younger girl began making a tour of inspection round the shop, poking her inquisitive little nose into everything. When she reached the glass door she opened it, saying, " What is there to be seen here ? "

" Nothing !—nothing ! " cried Yvonne hastily, " don't go in there, please ! "

Obediently the young girl turned away, without suspecting the agitation that she had caused in more than one breast.

At length they departed, and then Isfandiar, full of anxiety, came out of his hiding-place to enquire eagerly which of the younger ladies was Zarin Taj.

" She who, guided by instinct, almost threw herself into your arms ! " replied Yvonne. And Isfandiar was overjoyed.

It was a good augury, and the prospect of possessing so much loveliness for himself went far to outweigh the distastefulness of an alliance with the family of Bahadur. And besides, Zarin Taj was wealthy, and so young that it

would be an easy matter for her husband to mould her ideas to his own. So well pleased was he with his discovery that he never even dreamt of enquiring the identity of the other " moon."

It was Bibi Mâh !

. . . . .

Isfandiar was already decidedly old for a bachelor, since in Persia it is no uncommon thing to meet with young couples whose united ages would only amount to his own twenty-five years. His father's plans with regard to his marriage had been frustrated in the first place by his lengthened sojourn in Europe, and in the second place by his coming to Teheran, where Muzaffar-ud-Din Shah had detained him as a hostage, under colour of appointing him one of his aides-de-camp, an honour to which the new Shah had also constrained him. He had been betrothed at the tender age of six to one of his cousins german, with whom he had grown up as playmate until the age at which a girl is veiled. He had loved his little fiancée as a sister, a love which the Persians look upon as the best prelude to marital affection, *un amour pot-au-feu*, as we say in France, and which accustoms the future husband and wife to each other from childhood, and makes of the marriage bond but one link the more in the ties of family connection. This arrangement lacks the elements of romance, but, under the laws of Islam, which prevent an affianced couple from making acquaintance before the marriage ceremony, there is something to be said for it as a safeguard against unpleasant surprises.

During Isfandiar's absence in Europe his father, whose influence among the nomadic Bakhtiyari tribes was a source of annoyance to the princely Governor of Ispahan, had been captured by this latter, through an odious strategy, and had died mysteriously—doubtless by poison.

His uncle and the latter's family had been sent to Teheran as hostages for the loyalty of the tribes, and his young cousin and fiancée had been disposed of in marriage to a Court official by the Shah's command—as in Isfandiar's own case.

This uncle, Riza Kuli Khan, and the eldest of his wives, of whom he now had two, having recently wedded, also by royal command, a young lady of Teheran, represented for Isfandiar his absent family, a good office of which the young man had decided to avail himself, in view of his uncle's advances, although he was not on particularly good terms with him. The part played by Riza Kuli with regard to the capture of his brother had never been really elucidated, and public rumour amongst the Bakhtiyaris even accused him of having lent a hand in the deed, a fact of which Isfandiar was aware, but which, for the present occasion, he judged it wiser to forget, since definite proof was lacking.

Although everything had been arranged beforehand, all the regulation forms and ceremonies were carefully complied with, purely from motives of tradition, and so the wife of Riza Khan paid a formal visit to Baghir Khan and Turkan Khatun, and made the offer in the customary formula : " We desire to offer you our nephew Isfandiar Khan Bakhtiyari as your slave. Will you accept him ? " To which the parents of Zarin Taj replied, also in the customary formula : " We do accept him."

Immediately after this acceptance Isfandiar sent his fiancée a Cashmir shawl of great value, and a silver ring set with a turquoise, whilst to Turkan Khatun he sent a purse of gold pieces, for the *shirbaha*—the price of milk.

The same day Baghir and Riza Kuli met to discuss the financial aspect of the transaction. Isfandiar, on the one side, had to give to his fiancée a sum of money and a

certain amount of jewellery, and Baghir, being a man of substance, gave not only the trousseau and the furniture, but also a small fortune as dowry—all of which, in case of divorce, would revert to Zarin Taj as her own property. They next went together to consult an astrologer, by way of ascertaining the most propitious hour and day for the signing of the Contract, and for the wedding ceremonies, intimating as they did so that the Shah desired the nuptials to take place during the course of the week. The stars took good care not to oppose the will of the Shadow-of-Allah, and the astrologer recommended Wednesday and Thursday. To acquit his conscience to the full, he also reminded his clients of the occasions which were to be avoided. The Book of the Law is definitely formal upon these points: "A marriage may not be consummated while the moon is in the sign of the Scorpion, nor during a lunar eclipse, nor on the day of a solar eclipse, nor at mid-day, nor at the close of twilight, nor during the three last days of the month El-Mohak, during which the moon is below the horizon, nor between dawn and sunrise, nor during the first night of any month, except the month Ramazan, nor during the middle night of the month, nor during a journey, a tempest, or an earthquake."

Numberless invitations were then issued for the two ceremonies, that of the Contract, called *Shirini-Khûran*, or the Eating-of-the-Sweetmeats, and that of the wedding proper, called *Arusi*, which is followed by the *Zafaf* or Lifting-of-the-Veil. The first was to take place at the house of Baghir, the second, partly there and partly at the house of Isfandiar. Preparations on one side and the other went forward actively; the apartments of the *birûns* and the *anderûns* were decorated with a profusion of flower-vases, crystal candelabra, lamps, and mirrors; in the courts embroidered stuffs were hung against the walls, carpets were spread on the ground,

and numbers of flower-pots were ranged round the central tank.

Cooks were engaged, who improvised kitchens for themselves in the back-yards, the ordinary domestic offices of the houses not being sufficiently spacious to allow of the huge fires for roasting whole sheep, and spits with a dozen fowls on them, and of the improvised furnaces for boiling *pilaws* and *chilaws* of every description.

From my own quarters I could hear the bustle going on next door, turning the whole place upside-down, and on Wednesday, from early morning, the sound of tom-toms proclaimed to me the beginning of the festival.

I went up on to the terrace to watch the guests arriving. The Street of the Tulip-bed presented a scene of unwonted animation. A crowd of beggars and dervishes lined either side of the entrance door of Baghir's house, and many curious spectators took up their stand in front of it. Every moment carriages came dashing up, preceded by *jalowdars* yelling their "*Khabardar!*" ("Make way there!") in tones more or less resonant according to the importance of their masters. Some of the carriages had an additional escort of mounted *farrashes*, blazing with gold lace, and carrying in their hands silver-headed maces, or of horsemen, their rifles slung over their shoulders, their waistbelts adorned with cartridges. Such a medley of uniforms and of costumes, of various regiments and of different tribes!

A procession emerged from the Artillery Square, preceded by rustic and primitive music; Bakhtiyaris, I guessed, from their *kulas* of white felt. These were followed by two long files of *pish-khadmats*, bearing on their heads great trays of sweetmeats, piled pyramid-wise, and covered with lengths of parti-coloured stuff. Then came a company of mules with coloured harness and bridles of jingling bells, their panniers filled with gifts. And at

last Isfandiar and his uncle, in full Bakhtiyari dress, swung up in grand style in an open landau. I instinctively felt Isfandiar's embarrassment in the face of all this pomp, and the lift of his eyes heavenwards, as he raised his hand to me in salute, suggested the truth of this conviction. The cortège ended with a body of cavalry from his own regiment.

I had been invited to the festivities, but was only expected to appear during the course of the afternoon, for the morning was sacred to the intimate friends and relatives who came to witness the signing of the Contract.

Baghir Khan received in the *birûn* and Turkan Khatun in the *anderûn*. Tea and sweetmeats were partaken of, and *kalyans* smoked during the interval of waiting for the arrival of the mulla—for the bridal pair go neither to the mosque nor to the registrar's office.

The mulla made his solemn entry about ten o'clock, followed by his clerks. After the exchange of greetings and compliments, and the inevitable cup of tea, Baghir Khan led the way into the reception-room of the *anderûn*, divided in two for the occasion by a great curtain. Behind this curtain Zarin Taj and her mother were seated on throne-like arm-chairs, the female guests occupying a lowlier position on the carpet.

The mulla sat Persian fashion, on his heels, close to the curtain, the other men all doing the same. Then one of the clerks handed him a roll of parchment, upon which was inscribed the *Akd*—the Contract. He adjusted his gold spectacles, coughed, sniffed, invoked Allah, passing his hand over his face, and began to read: "*Hu!*—Him!—" Then came a pause, the silence broken only by scarcely perceptible whisperings from the other side of the curtain.

"By agreement between His Excellency Riza Kuli Khan, Bakhtiyari, the *vakil* for Isfandiar Khan, Sartip,

son of the late Imam Kuli, Ilkhani of the Bakhtiyaris, and His Excellency Baghir Khan, the Magnificence-of-the Royal-Intimacy, Isfandiar hereby acknowledges to have received the *mahr*—or dowry—of Zarin Taj Khanum, daughter of Baghir Khan aforesaid, which has been given into his keeping, and which, in case of divorce or demise, shall return to her or to her heirs. It consists of the following items. . . . " And the list of the dowry given by Baghir and Isfandiar to Zarin Taj was then read out in the ears of the assembly, amid exclamations of admiration from both sides of the curtain.

Then, addressing Baghir, the mulla proceeded : " Your Excellencies ! "—politeness demands the use of the third person plural in addressing a personage of importance—" Do Your Excellencies consent to bestow their daughter Zarin Taj Khanum upon His Excellency Isfandiar as wife ? "

" *Bali*—yes, I consent ! " replied, without enthusiasm, the Magnificence-of-the-Royal-Intimacy.

" And Your Excellency Zarin Taj Khanum—are you there ? . . . Are you there ? "

" *Bali ! bali !* " cried all the ladies. " She is here, by Allah ! "

" Do you consent to become the wife of Isfandiar Khan ? "

A " Yes," full of emotion, trembled from behind the curtain, followed immediately by the declaration of the mulla, " *Al-hamdullah, ar-Rahman, ar-Rahim*—In the Name of Allah, the Clement, the Merciful, in the name of Mohammed, the Prophet of Allah, and of His Highness Ali, his *Vali*, I declare Isfandiar and Zarin Taj Khanum husband and wife ! " And having moistened the parchment with his tongue, he affixed to it his seal, all the witnesses following suit, after which it was passed under the curtain to the bride.

Amidst the noise of congratulations, the men returned to the *birûn*, Isfandiar alone remaining behind, waiting till the veils should have fallen again over the faces of the women to pass through to the *anderûn* side to partake with Zarin Taj, now his lawful wife, of the sweetmeats emblematic of that sweetness which should lie before them in their married life. He presented the ladies, as they congratulated him, with little gifts of gold pieces. Then he returned to the *birûn* to rejoin Baghir and his guests.

Before presenting myself at the house of feasting, I again went on to the terrace to watch the arrival of the later guests. Mirza Jafar pointed out to me by name those with whom I was unacquainted, for he knows everyone. The remains of the luncheon had been brought out to the poor gathered in the street, and they partook of the scraps with relish, driving off with stones the dogs who came to claim their share in the general plenty.

The stream of carriages was never-ending, for many visitors did no more than just pass in and out again—Colonel Liakoff being of this number. He arrived in a carriage closely surrounded by Cossacks, and left again a few moments later. Almost at the same instant a closed *calèche* came up, with canary-coloured blinds tightly drawn, and black eunuchs on horseback galloping before it as *jalowdars*, cracking their whips and crying, " Be ye blind ! " whilst others rode at either door, and horsemen in Kurdish costume formed the escort. Immediately the centre of the roadway was emptied of the crowd, who fled to hide their faces against the walls; those mounted servants, who were awaiting their masters at the door of the house, dismounted and hid behind their steeds; and the poor abandoned their meal to prostrate themselves with their heads in the dust. A Princess of the Royal Harem was arriving, whose very coach must remain

unseen by the profane eye of man. She was coming to honour with her presence the Eating-of-the-Sweetmeats.

When at length I saw Madame Chabret and Vecquincourt arriving, I ran down hastily ; but our Vizieress had already disappeared behind the hangings of the door of the *anderûn*, when I reached my colleague. He and I went into the *birûn* together.

The court presented a most gay appearance, the colours all running into each other as on the palette of a painter, hangings, carpets, flowers rivalling one another in brightness. The margin of the tank was ornamented with fruit of all kinds, whilst on the surface of the water floated rose-petals, so arranged as to form in Arabic characters the words " *Bismillah !* " (" In the name of Allah "), the usual formula of welcome among Mussulmans. The slightest breeze would have destroyed this fragile *chef d'œuvre ;* fortunately the day was absolutely still.

At the door of the *talar* Baghir received us effusively. " You have brought happiness ! Your place was empty ! " And he carried his hand to his heart in token of the sincerity of his words. " Command ! " he added, motioning towards some seats—" Command ! "—that is, " Make yourselves at home ! "

Isfandiar, catching sight of us, came up to press our hands. He appeared happy—or, at all events, elated. We partook of sweetmeats to his happiness, as we should have drunk to the same intention in our own country. But for the absence of the feminine element it would have been absolutely delightful. " You need to be born in the harem not to feel that missing note," Vecquincourt said to me.

At this moment there was a considerable stir in the room, and the Amir Bahadur made his entry. With his high cheek-bones, like those of a Kalmuck, and his black, henna-tinted beard, trimmed fan-wise and depilated

along the edges, his appearance was more Asiatic than ever, in spite of his black frock-coat. Baghir sent a servant across to fetch Isfandiar, and presently we saw him bending modestly before the favourite of the Shah come to give him his congratulations. As soon as he could, he slipped away again and rejoined us. All the colour had gone from his face. "I hate him—that son of a burnt father!" he hissed in guarded accents, then louder—"Let's get away!" And he led us into an adjoining apartment, where dancers and buffoons were doing their utmost to amuse the company, amongst whom the slipperless servants threaded their way in and out with tea, *kalyans*, and sweetmeats.

I—in this house! And Bibi Mâh there, close by, under the same roof! I made no attempt to analyse my feelings; my head throbbed and hummed. I was indeed in the house of Bibi Mâh—*birûn* or *anderûn*, it was all the same *her* house! Baghir was there, too—and he had told me—oh! the irony of it—"Your place is empty!" And there was no one to whom I could open my heart, for, in spite of myself, I was bound to observe a truly Mohammedan discretion. I would not even dare breathe a word to Vecquincourt. Yvonne alone knew my secret—but she was also on the other side of the wall. I felt myself most embarrassed with regard to Isfandiar. I would gladly have told him all—but no, it was impossible!

"Let us go!" I whispered to Vecquincourt. "This noise and the smoke are making me feel quite ill!"

For Isfandiar the day was by no means ended. When evening was come, in conformity with a custom which his European education had taught him to regard as an exploded convention, he must repair with some of his friends to the *hammam*, there to undergo, to the sound of music, the toilette of a bridegroom. At the last moment a servant arrived, bringing him a complete costume

A PERSIAN WOMAN IN INDOOR COSTUME

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from his tailor's, the gift of his wife, together with a ring and a small sachet of embroidered silk, containing a handful of earth from Mecca, upon which he should lay his forehead when praying. He dismissed the messenger with a present of money and the clothes he had worn on entering the *hammam*.

The next day, both at his house and at that of Baghir, they celebrated the *Arusi*, in reality a continuation of the Eating-of-the-Sweetmeats. Isfandiar's house is smaller and more simply decorated than Baghir's more pretentious residence; it is furnished in a modern and almost European style, not without—oh, horrors!—that touch of Teutonic taste which finds such favour among the Young Turks of Constantinople. It is a sign of the times, and we cannot but regret the vanishing East as it wakes to our Western ideas, and loses its own picturesque atmosphere, so pleasing to the selfish traveller with no thought beyond his own transient impressions of people and places.

The company here differed also from that of the previous day. And as, in these surroundings, spoiled by European anachronisms, I gazed upon this gathering of Young Persians, all clad in the long black frock-coats, out of fashion and badly cut, that detracted so painfully from their looks and gave them the appearance of coloured people—which they are not!—I began to hate Progress, and to "burn the fathers of the Constitution" with a fanaticism worthy of Baghir or of Bahadur himself. Why is it that modern thought cannot content itself with the transformation of minds? Why must it bring in its train bad taste and ugliness? Harun-ar-Rashid is one of the few Liberals I know who insists upon remaining picturesquely Persian, and who does not imagine that the whole of civilisation lies in the use of chairs and the wearing of hideous clothing—two things which were, for

many of those present, the most conspicuous reforms of the new régime. It is thus that the wearing of a starched collar has come to be the mark of the Constitutionalists, gaining for them, among the Reactionaries, the nickname of "Starched-Collarites."

Still, one could not quite forget that one was in Persia, not only on account of the *kulas*, of the colourless or swarthy complexions, and of the volubility of the talk and the poetry of the compliments all round one, but also because the architecture of the *talar* in which we were assembled was essentially Persian, its front, opening on to a courtyard, the exquisite pointed arches of its *takht-chas*, its ceiling of carved wood, brilliantly coloured, and its stained-glass windows. And then, more Persian even than all this was the string of phantom ladies crossing the courtyard to reach the *anderûn*, where the wives of Riza Kuli were receiving their guests prior to the arrival in the evening of the young wife, for in this more modest dwelling there was not, as with Baghir, a separate entrance to the women's quarters.

The trays of sweetmeats, the *samovars*, and the tea equipages were not laid on the floor here, but upon tables, and the traditional *kalyan* had given place to the cigarette.

No Bahadur, or even Liakoff, was amongst these guests, but in the midst of all the up-to-date "Starched-Collarites" I was glad to see advancing, modest and delicate in appearance, his ascetic visage crowned by a turban of dark blue, the Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din, in the flowing robes of the good old days.

He was at once surrounded, and I had difficulty in making my way to his side, wishing as I did to speak to him. The occasions of our meeting were few and far between; he goes little among Europeans, for whom personally he has no great love, in spite of his admiration of their civilisation, from which he would borrow, how-

ever, only such things as appear to him in keeping with the teachings of the Koran.

Whilst we were conversing Ihtisham-us-Saltana, the new President of the *Majlis*, entered, closely followed by Prince Harun-ar-Rashid, whose presence at once lent an air of brightness to the scene.

Time passed quickly in such good company, and when I at length took my departure night was already falling, and the cortège which was to go and fetch the bride was in process of formation.

An hour later, I saw it pass from my own house. It had stopped at the entrance of the *anderûn* next door, where Zarin Taj and her mother were awaiting its arrival in a carriage with closed blinds, and covered with a huge Cashmir shawl, while the men of Baghir's household were letting off fireworks and firing guns, and the musicians were playing with all their might. Zarin Taj's possessions were loaded on to mules, the *pish-khadmats* hoisted the smaller packages on to their heads, and the cortège started back again between two files of torch and *fanus* bearers, as fantastic as that of a Princess in the Thousand and One Nights. All the terraces were thronged with women and children, and the streets were crammed with open-mouthed spectators.

On their arrival at Isfandiar's door, his servant, Ahmad, following the custom of the nomadic tribes, cut the throat of a young camel upon the threshold, which was covered with a stream of blood, and when Zarin Taj alighted from the carriage, enveloped in a rose-coloured, gold-spangled veil, she trod this ruddy and still warm carpet with her slippered feet, to exorcise the bad Jinns. In the *anderûn* of her new home she found all the female guests assembled, and there was a fresh Eating-of-the-Sweetmeats until late in the night. Then everyone withdrew, including Turkan Khatun, for the Lifting-of-the-Veil.

Zarin Taj, left alone, re-covered her head with the great bridal veil, and waited, tremblingly, for the arrival of her lord and master. He came in softly, full of emotion himself, and presented to her upon a copper tray the gifts of the *Zafaf*—a mirror and a jewel.

The young couple were now standing side by side in the solemn silence. A delicate hand, laden with rings, stole out from beneath the veil—took the mirror from the tray; then, turning her back upon Isfandiar, Zarin Taj, with her other hand, slowly lifted the rosy veil with its glittering spangles of gold, and, in the mirror held at arm's length, revealed to the enchanted gaze of her husband the rounded face of his bride, as a moon that rises in the gardens of the firmament.

CHAPTER III

SHAH AND "MAJLIS"

November 12th.

TO-DAY the Shah paid a state visit to the *Majlis*, and as if to demonstrate how frankly anti-constitutional he really is, in his inmost heart, the occasion was attended by the utmost possible pomp, and by all the ceremonial of the days of Absolutism. The Princes of the Blood, including even the redoubtable Zill-us-Sultán, acted as escort, followed by all those who had any pretensions to the title of Vizier or to a place in the Royal Household, and by the clergy of every shade of religious opinion. Baghir Khan and Sayyid Ibrahim were, of course, among the suite.

Extraordinary precautions had been taken to safeguard the life of the unpopular sovereign, precautions worthy of the Czar Nicholas and of Abdul Hamid himself, and most displeasing to the good people of Teheran. The streets between the Palace and the Baharistan, the House of Parliament, were guarded by soldiers, and the Cossacks beat fiercely back into the surrounding thoroughfares those loyal subjects for whom the Shah is always, and in spite of everything, the Shadow of Allah and the symbol of Persian nationality. It was worse than the passage of the Royal Harem.

Nothing could have been more impolitic. Henceforth the Shah is no longer, even for the ignorant populace,

the Lion before whom they tremble—it is he himself who is afraid!

At the Baharistan the reception was short, the customary salaams and compliments were exchanged, presented in the name of the National Assembly by the Grand Mujtahid Sayyid Abdullah—His Majesty preserving a haughty demeanour; then the President laid before his sovereign a Koran, together with a parchment upon which was inscribed, in beautiful rounded characters, the "Solemn Oath" provided for in the Thirty-ninth Article of the Constitution:

"I take to witness the Almighty and Most High Allah, on the glorious Word of Allah, and by all that is most honourable in the sight of Allah, and I hereby swear that I will do all in my power to preserve the independence of Persia, safeguard and protect the frontiers of my Kingdom and the rights of my People, observe the Fundamental Laws of the Persian Constitution, rule in accordance with the established laws of Sovereignty, do my utmost to promote the *Ja'fari* doctrine of the Creed of the Twelve Imams, and will in all that I do consider Allah the Most Glorious as present and watching me. Moreover, I ask help from Allah, from Whom alone all help comes, and seek assistance from the Saints of Islam in my endeavours for the welfare of Persia."

A smile which meant much lit up for a moment the swollen, expressionless face of Mohammed Ali, and then he subscribed to the oath with no more show of emotion than if he had been performing the most trivial ceremony. Possibly, familiarity had bred contempt, seeing that this is already the third or fourth time that he has sworn fidelity to the Constitution!

As no sound followed from the Assembly, the President called for cheers for the Shah, which produced a volume of acclamation, loud and long, indeed, but deceiving no

A SHAH OF THE ANCIEN RÉGIME RECEIVING HIS VIZIERS

(FROM A NATIVE PRINT)

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one ; worth, in fact, precisely as much as the Oath which it applauded.

But all the same, Mirza Jafar seems to think that this apparent reconciliation between the Shah and the *Majlis* has made a certain impression on the people at large.

CHAPTER IV

TEARS

BIBI MÂH is becoming decidedly imprudent in her conduct, and almost every day now her signal—a black scarf—beckons to me on the terrace.

Her lot has been anything but happy since Zarin Taj's marriage, and she confided her trouble to me when I joined her. It seems that Turkan Khatun, who is anxious to get rid of her, not only makes her life unbearable, but is also intriguing to bring about her marriage with Sayyid Ibrahim. Yesterday she had a long talk on this subject with Baghir Khan, and as she is not without a certain instinctive cleverness, she has managed to persuade him that this marriage would be the most effectual means of bringing about a reconciliation with the Sayyid, to whom Zarin Taj's marriage with Isfandiar, although the result of a direct command of the Shah, has given dire offence. And the friendship of Ibrahim is not to be despised, since he has some influence at Court and a certain following amongst the people.

Bibi Mâh is terrified at the prospect before her; the hideousness and well-known brutality of this wretch fill her with loathing. He has already two legitimate wives and several *Sighas*, and his mother, who presides over his *anderûn*, is a perfect dragon.

Her eyes were drowned in tears, she did not heed my consoling words, into which, indeed, I found it difficult to introduce the ring of conviction, for what could I do

to improve matters ? In truth, there was every reason in the world against the possibility of my helping her. And I was not sufficiently in love to commit the folly of carrying her off—a folly which could only end in trouble for both of us, if not in death.

I had been terribly to blame for not reflecting as to the possible consequences of my little flirtation. It had never occurred to me to resist what was at first mere curiosity and afterwards the powerful attraction of the mystery and danger of this Oriental adventure. And now that the wall of the harem had begun to fall I hesitated, naturally, to throw myself into the breach ! What a pitiful hero of romance I should have made, to be sure !

Filled with distress, and with rage against myself—and above all against Islam the inexorable—I watched the poor child's slow tears.

They lingered, as if reluctant to leave the eye-lids of Bibi Mâh, these tears, pent in by the long lashes as by a dam of rushes. Then they dropped, one by one, and flowed over her cheek in different directions to lose themselves at last in the folds of her tulle *chargat.* One of them was so large and heavy that the lashes seemed to bend beneath its slowly moving weight. It fell on to her cheek, where it hung for a moment, as if irresolute, to slip down the next instant to the bewitching valley of a dimple at the corner of her mouth, then, spreading, it reached her lips and hid in their rosy flower.

How I envied that tear !

" If thou wert a Mussulman," sighed Bibi Mâh, " then we could wed and take up our abode yonder, at Shiraz, where I was born and where I am fain to die ! "

" Alas, I am not a Mussulman, my soul ! It was not so written in the Book of Fate ! "

" But Allah alone knows that which is written on the next page ! *I* have great hopes !—

'The Sleepers hear not the song of the Bird of Morning,'

—I will awake thee, *inshallah !* "

She was no longer weeping, only one tear hung still upon her lashes, and as Bibi Mâh bent her head with a languishing air, the tear slid rapidly down, right to the dear little tip of her dear little nose !

" Why laughest thou, O wicked Frank ? "

" I am rejoicing in thy hopes, and I am thinking that anyone so pretty as thou hast no right to rail thus against life !—

'In Paradise the houris deem that Purgat'ry is Hell,
In Hell, the name of Purgat'ry is Paradise as well !' "

What my arguments had not been able to accomplish, two lines of Saadi brought suddenly about, as Bibi Mâh's smile assured me. We wished each other " *Khuda hafiz*," and she was gone.

. . . . .

But what of my rôle in this comedy with its touch of shadow ?

CHAPTER V

THE BUDGET

November 25th, 1907.

"THE *Majlis* is a moth fluttering round the torch of the Budget, whereat it will eventually burn its wings."

These words were uttered by Baghir Khan in the course of a political discussion at Isfandiar's, at which I was present.

Events seem likely to endorse this statement on the part of Bibi Mâh's guardian, for the farther the *Majlis* advances along the path of financial reform the nearer draw its wings to the fatal flame.

After seven months' work the twelve members of the Finance Committee have issued the first Budget. What a revolution is expressed in those two words, "First Budget"! They have worked at it daily from early morning until three hours after sunset, without so much as allowing themselves a break for the lunch which they caused to be brought to them at the scene of their labours. Upon the advice of Nasir-ul-Mulk, an expert financier, they have not attempted to augment the Revenue, a proceeding too complicated and also too risky for this initial stage; they have confined their attention entirely to questions of economy. And in theory, if not in practice, they have attained their object, in reducing the expenditure from £2,000,000 to £1,200,000, the Revenue now being £1,430,000. It was a clever piece of work thus

to turn a deficit of £570,000 into a surplus of £230,000, and the cleverness verges on the miraculous when one remembers that the highest in the land, the Court, the Shah himself and his family, pay the piper.

The pensions have been reduced all round or abolished. The Shah can henceforth no longer dip into the State Revenues at will, he is to be placed on the Civil List to the yearly tune of £100,000. His brother, Shua-us-Saltana, enjoyed a yearly pension of £25,000, Zill-us-Sultan one of £15,000; it has been decided that all the Princes of the Blood shall draw a uniform yearly allowance of £2400, irrespective of their private personal fortunes.

Then there has been a reorganisation of the *tuyuls*, i.e. the appropriation of the revenues of villages or districts to the payment of pensions or salaries due from the Royal Treasury, a practice which has ended by absorbing every place in the country. This has given rise to innumerable abuses on the part of the beneficiaries, whose sole aim is to be constantly bleeding the villages by cruelties, of which the bastinado is among the mildest. These *tuyuls* are an institution coeval with Persia itself. When Themistocles took refuge with Artaxerxes, he received *tuyuls* of three towns of Mysia—Cyzicus, Abydus, and Lampsacus—as revenue. Later, Parysatis, the widow of Darius II, possessed similar *tuyuls*, if we may believe Xenophon, who writes in his *Anabasis:* "The villages where they encamped belonged to Parysatis, and had been assigned to her for her girdle."

Another abuse, eminently Persian, which the *Majlis* has attempted to remedy is the *tafawut-i-amal*, or "Practical Difference." Since the time of their original assessment, the villages have furnished to the Treasury larger or smaller revenues, according to their growth or decline in importance. But it is only in the event of the second of these contingencies that the difference is felt by the

Treasury, since those interested in making the returns are careful not to report an increase. From which, no doubt, comes the qualification " practical " !

These reforms, and especially the one to ensure the honest collection of taxes, which the fiscal agents and governors levy two and three times over if not oftener, in order to line their own pockets with the surplus, have contributed to spread the popularity of the *Majlis* amongst the people ; in many places its very existence is unknown except by these reforms. But they have also raised up a host of irreconcilable enemies amongst the influential classes, who profited by the old condition of affairs.

And these enemies, at whose head are the Shah himself and all the Palace clique, called in derision the "*Anjuman* of Gulistan," are preparing for a serious attack on the Liberal Party; intrigues are already on foot, Saad-ud-Dowla, the brutal Amir Bahadur, and the Russian Shapshal being at the helm. We may therefore look for fresh excitements.

Such was the principal topic of conversation at the Legation luncheon, and the Oriental Secretary, who is always extremely well-informed with regard to the doings of the two Persian factions, predicts serious complications.

The prudence of the Government is painfully suggestive of weakness. Nasir-ul-Mulk, the Prime Vizier, like the English Prime Minister a graduate of Balliol College, Oxford—there is no longer a Grand Vizier—is certainly lacking in decision and in initiative. This gives the Reactionary Party the advantage, and the general condition of disorder throughout the country is becoming more and more pronounced. And it is the *Majlis* which is held responsible for all this. It must be admitted that, with the exception of certain wise reforms, whose execution has not always been possible, nor is likely to be

so without sound financial support, the Assembly has deceived many expectations. How could it be otherwise in the present condition of the country and with the natural fickleness of the Persian mind? On Thursday the Mujtahid Sayyid Mohammed did not hesitate to say to the Chamber, "The praises of a Constitutional Government have been chanted to us. If this be the result, I do not see its advantages. Is it not the duty of the Sovereign to prevent disorder? Under present conditions life is impossible in this country!"

Will the Moth burn its wings, in accordance with the hopes of Baghir, or will it be the "fathers" of the Reactionaries who are burnt by the torch of the Budget?

"THE SHAH TRYING VAINLY TO PLUCK THE GRAPES OF THE REVENUE"

(FROM THE "AZARBAYJAN")

CHAPTER VI

POLITICS IN THE "ANDERÛN"

ALTHOUGH highly loquacious in all that concerns himself alone, Isfandiar is the most reserved of mortals as regards his household. Up to to-day he had not so much as mentioned his wife's name to me, and, intimate as are our relations, I had always taken good care not to make the slightest allusion to that sacred portion of his life, which, I imagine, is not particularly happy, for he has lost so much of his exuberant gaiety since his marriage.

This afternoon, as we rode along, side by side, in the teeth of a boisterous wind, he was in an extremely bad temper, and began raging against the Russians with a quite unprecedented violence. The present state of affairs was their doing, and if anything miscarried with regard to the Assembly, they would be sure to have had a finger in it. Where did the Shah get all the money necessary for his intrigues? Report said from the Reactionary Party, but the Reactionary Party were themselves on the make, and it was no part of their plan to pay out money! His father-in-law, Baghir, did not in the least give him the idea of a man who was robbing himself for love of his Master; on the contrary, he seemed in extremely good spirits, and his arrogance knew no bounds. He had sent for him at mid-day that day, on his return from the Palace, and had suggested his going with him to call on Amir Bahadur Jang. But Isfandiar, divining his object

to be his own conversion to the Reactionary ranks, had refused to do so. He wished to steer clear of these men, whom he cursed beyond all creation. The Reactionary Party were bracing themselves up, no doubt for some act of perfidy. The scent of evil hung in the air. There was no mistaking the temper of the address of Mohammed Ali to the *Majlis*, in which he insisted on the necessity of entirely separating the executive duties of the Government from the legislative powers of the Assembly, and laid stress on the lamentable state of disorder into which the whole country had fallen, and finally urged the suppression of those local committees—the *Anjumans*—which unduly interfered in Government affairs, and were a cause of the disturbance of the public peace, announcing that his Viziers had been given orders to effect their suppression.

Furthermore, the reconciliation of Sayyid Ibrahim with Baghir Khan, just concluded under the ægis of Bahadur, augured no good. Isfandiar, therefore, thought it better to be quite frank with his father-in-law as to his resolution never to form one of the "*Anjuman* of Gulistan." "You will live to regret it!" had been Baghir's parting shot as he dismissed him.

On his return home he had found his mother-in-law in the *anderûn*.

So unstrung was he that he did not apparently remember that he was approaching delicate ground at this point in his recital, and to my astonishment he went on with it.

Turkan Khatun had been all honey. Zarin Taj led the conversation on to the subject of a fight which had taken place on the previous Thursday between the Cossacks and the Silakhuris, in which two or three men had been killed on either side, drawing therefrom the moral that it behoved everyone to be on good terms with

the Amir Bahadur, whose growing power seemed able to stand up against even the Cossack Liakoff.

And Turkan added, turning to Isfandiar, "You are going to call on the Amir, are you not, Isfandiar?"

But on his replying in the negative, the atmosphere had changed. The "mother-in-law"—who is as much a reality in Persia as elsewhere—stood revealed, lamenting that she should have given her only daughter, the light of her eyes, to a destroyer of the religion of the blessed Imam, to a "Starched-Collarite." There was nothing left for her but to cover her head with ashes and resign herself to the Will of Allah.

Zarin Taj had begun to weep; he had gone out, banging the door after him.

This Turkan Khatun, whom Bibi Mâh so cordially detested, was also spoiling the life of Isfandiar. She was round at his house daily, and through her he saw less and less of his wife, whose head was so stuffed with the ideas of intrigue suggested by the old woman, that, in the evening, instead of being the loving spouse whom he had the right to look for, she drove him crazy with her talk about politics. Before his marriage he had been a strong advocate of female emancipation; he had frequented the houses of various French ladies in Paris, and had been much impressed with their wit and knowledge. Now he was fast returning to the original ideas of his race, and wishing that his wife had been brought up to be a good wife and mother instead of being "educated" in the rudimentary and unmethodical fashion in use among the rising female generation of the upper classes in Persia.

"Why don't you take a second wife?" I asked him, "a woman of the old school; that would create a balance of powers."

"No," he replied, "I don't want to run my head into the noose of polygamy!"

And he changed the conversation abruptly, with a rapid question or two. Did I know when my countryman, M. Bizot, the Councillor of Finance, was expected to arrive, to assist Nasir-ul-Mulk in rearranging their finances? And without waiting for my reply: What did I think of their Premier's idea of disbanding the existing army and replacing it by a force of military police, just sufficient to secure public peace?

"It is an ultra-modern idea, of course," I answered him, "one which would gladden the hearts of our own Socialist party. And since the Anglo-Russian Convention, Persia has no actual need of a standing army; but the Cossacks have hitherto been more of policemen than soldiers, haven't they?"

"Yes," he returned, gloomily, "but police in the service of Russia—and of the autocrat Shahin-Shah!"

CHAPTER VII

A SUNDAY IN TEHERAN

Sunday, December 1st.

A LARGE congregation filled the Church of the Lazarist Fathers at High Mass this morning to hear the sermon by His Eminence Monsignor Khodabakhsh, who has been sent here to confer with our Minister, by the Apostolic Delegate of His Holiness Pope Pius X, in charge of Catholic interests in Urmia, in Azarbayjan.

The personality of the great preacher is a curious one, if one may be allowed the expression in connection with a prelate of such high dignity.

Born in a Nestorian village, perched eyrie-like among the mountains of Kurdistan, his early years were spent in tending goats in the green valleys of Tergaver on the Turkish frontier. His father was the parish priest of Manava, a fact at which no one need be shocked, for Pope Leo XIII sanctioned the marriages of those Nestorian priests who embraced the Catholic faith. The Missionary Fathers of Urmia, who had undertaken the education of his brothers, hesitated to do as much in his case, on account of his wild and savage nature, but at the age of eighteen he was severely wounded whilst defending his native village against the plunder and rapine of the Kurds, who would have stolen both harvest and maidens, and during the illness which ensued he was favoured with a vision of Mar-Ghivargis—St. George—who predicted for him the sacerdotal tonsure. This vision changed his

whole life. After three years of study in the Catholic Mission in Urmia, he was sent to Rome, to the College of the Propaganda, where he proved himself a pupil of remarkable intelligence. During seven years he studied with pious ardour the mysteries of the holy Faith, then, returning to his own country, he became Bishop of Salmas before he had a grey hair in his head. There was no better preacher among the Missionary Fathers, and no finer man in all the surrounding district, his type being that of the Assyrian Kings who live in the bas-reliefs of Persepolis.

For me, however, his sermon on this occasion was rather a disappointment. I expected more modern views; but, without doubt, the constant intercourse with a primitive race must tend to the employment of those methods which have conduced so greatly to the popularity amongst the Mohammedans of Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din, with this difference, that long residence in Rome has deprived the Christian Bishop of that picturesque force of language which is the heritage of the Moslem priest.

The chapel, carefully concealed from view, as is always the case with Christian churches in a Mohammedan country, lay in a little by-street between the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs and the Street of the Tulip-bed, and after Mass the court of the building assumed its usual animated appearance of a reception-room, the congregation standing about and chatting in little groups round the various leaders of local society, whilst friendly greetings and the gossip of the week flew from one to another. I had invited Mme Chabret, Yvonne, and Vecquincourt to lunch with me, and the Embassy carriage having been dismissed, we strolled round to my house, under a cloudless sky and such brilliant sunshine as put to shame the costly furs of my guests.

The little party was extremely pleasant, enlivened as

it was by the presence of Yvonne with her sparkling wit and by the graciousness of our " Vizieress," our enjoyment being the greater on account of the freedom of speech made possible by the fact that nothing we said could be understood or repeated by our attendants, for Mansur, who alone is conversant with any European language, does not, of course, wait at table.

Vecquincourt, always extremely up-to-date, had a fund of anecdote about the man of the hour, Monsignor Khodabakhsh, whose energy in fighting for the rights of his flock against their Moslem oppressors renders him as popular with the one as he is unpopular with the other. On one occasion, it would seem, the Governor of Azerbayjan determined upon his arrest, but the holy man got wind of the affair a few moments before the arrival of the soldiers at his palace, which gave him just time to scale the garden wall, cloak himself in a woman's *chadur*, and flee from under the very noses of his persecutors, riding a donkey and escorted like a bride!

Beneath the sacramental dignity of the Bishop the savage child of Nature still remains, nor has the teaching of Rome been able entirely to efface in him all traces of hereditary Nestorianism; he still retains certain superstitions from the creed of his forefathers. It was fortunate for him, however, that his own father embraced the Catholic faith, for otherwise he, the son, could never have attained to the brilliancy of his present position, a Nestorian priest having no chance of the Episcopate, which with them is an hereditary office, descending, not from father to son, celibacy being compulsory for a Bishop, but from uncle to nephew. It is the Bishop's brother and his wife, or failing them, his sister and her husband, upon whom devolve the honour and responsibility of producing his successor, and the mother prepares herself for this high privilege by a strict abstinence from

all flesh food, not only until the birth of the child, but until he is weaned, such abstinence being held to entail upon the youth a particular " purity " whereby he is fitted for his sacred office, and in comparison with which the question of age, of education, and of intellectual attainments sinks into insignificance.

" And this ' purity,' " put in Yvonne, " makes of him as good a bishop as the baptism administered by the extremely short-sighted St. Mael to the penguins made of them good Christians—if we may believe Anatole France ! "

The last mail from Europe had brought her the recently-published *Ile des Pingouins*, and she was so enthusiastic over it that she did not shrink from this rather flimsy expedient to turn the conversation to the flowery but disenchanted garden of the philosopher-poet with the pliant yet complex, sceptical yet tender soul, whose delicate irony is clothed in grace and beauty.

I rather think that Yvonne's own soul is a reflex of this other, with, doubtless, less of scepticism, in spite of the disillusions which life has already brought her.

And as she discovered to us the beauties of this, the latest, work of her—I might say of us both, *our*—favourite author, she discovered to us also, unconsciously, something of the beauty of her own soul.

Vecquincourt, like myself, was carried away by her charm, while as for Mme Chabret, she had long ago fallen under the thrall of Yvonne's personality. She had made no secret of her liking for " Mme Basqueville," from the first moment of her introduction to her by me, and it was a subject of much regret to her that Yvonne's false position amongst those engaged in trade precluded the possibility of a real intimacy between them. It was not merely the idea of her own official dignity which rendered such a thing out of the question ; it was the fact, also, that the

other ladies of the diplomatic and professional circles in Teheran refused to recognise socially the representative of the Maison Paquin, glad of the excuse which imprisoned this beautiful woman, so much more beautiful, elegant, and highly born than themselves, behind the fatal barrier of the counter. Mme Chabret felt bound to respect their jealous prejudices, and consequently confined her invitations to "Mme Basqueville" to those occasions when she was sure of being alone. And Yvonne, understanding the position perfectly, was extremely chary on *her* side of accepting even these limited advances, and always found important engagements to keep her from the Legation on At Home days.

As I escorted Mme Chabret to her carriage after lunch, she said to me :

"What an exquisite woman Madame Basqueville is ! And what a pity she is married ! She would have made an ideal wife for you—and—later on—such an ambassadress ! "

. . . . . .

Although Sunday is not the Persian holy day, Friday being, as with all Mohammedans, their Sabbath, Yvonne always closes her shop on that day, and her harem *clientèle* must put up with her doing so as best they may !

"Yvonne closes her shop ! " The incongruity of these words shocks my conventionality, and yet this trade connection is entirely to her honour, and I admire her for her courage. Anyone else in her position would have clung on to the skirts, however ragged, of their family.

What an example for her brother ! that brother who is vegetating in their tumbledown Norman castle, his sole amusement hunting, his sole occupation the care of a wretched property which barely produces the necessaries of life for himself and his aged father. One more instance

of that *noblesse oblige* of a former age, which presses with a heavy and stifling hand upon the energies of so many among the youth of France!

The provincial aristocracy, set sourly in their old traditions, disapprove as a whole of marrying beneath them for the sake of money. The old Count Adhéaume de Basqueville would never have given his consent to so disgraceful a proceeding!

Yvonne closes her shop on Sundays, and this afternoon she took advantage of the holiday to visit the bazar. I escorted her thither.

Communication with the outside world from here takes so long that New Year's gifts for friends in Europe have to be purchased well in advance of the date, especially in these unsettled times, when there is no knowing from day to day whether the bazar will be open on the morrow.

Turquoises are the presents most expected from Persia. They are also the ones most easily sent—being the lightest and least in bulk—and perhaps the most easily bought, since they are to be found here in large quantities and at all prices. Yvonne is a great judge of them, having possessed very remarkable specimens herself; they are, with pearls, her favourite jewels.

We made straight for the Bazar of the Jewellers, hidden away among the labyrinth of arched avenues in which the shopkeepers of Teheran have their booths, grouped together according to the different trades. It is useless to attempt driving here, for the place is so blocked that one would never reach one's destination. Walking is the most practicable way of getting about, but in the company of an extremely pretty and unveiled woman this, even, is not so easy! Everyone stopped to admire Yvonne as we passed, men, women, and children. Some actually surrounded us and stared right into the face of my lovely companion, but for the most part they were

civil enough, and drew back respectfully out of our way.

Yvonne was certainly looking particularly charming. A tailor-made gown of chestnut velvet, edged with fur, outlined her *svelte* figure—her cypress grace, as they say here—to perfection, and her fur toque with its plumed aigrette set off to advantage the rippling gold of her hair. She had become used to this indiscreet admiration of the Persian crowd, which no longer disconcerted her, and had accustomed herself to ignore the remarks of which she was the cynosure. Very crude they were, too, these remarks, whether coming from the mouth of man or woman—sufficient at times to bring a blush to the cheek of a trooper !

The Bazar of the Jewellers is less frequented than most ; there is about it an air of seclusion, and almost of silence, as of some sanctuary. Phantom shapes of women flitting furtively into the twilight gloom of the shops are what one chiefly encounters.

The " windows " offered but little to delay us in the way of attraction, for the really valuable jewels are never exposed in this way, partly through prudence, but principally because the wily art of the Eastern shopkeeper leading the customer on from point to point up the gradual scale of temptation, keeps until last, and under the most propitious conditions of light and of setting, the revelation before his dazzled gaze of some most precious jewel of all, upon which the owner is counting as a final and irresistible bait.

As we entered the shop most usually patronised by Yvonne, two phantoms glided out, the *chadur* of rich silk worn by the first, together with the richly jewelled fastening of her *ruhband*, proclaiming her a lady of quality, whilst in the modest cotton *chadur* of the other lay the indication of the servant's humbler rank. And, indeed,

ladies of quality were likely to patronise this particular merchant. He was the only one from whom they could obtain the finest quality of turquoises, which he bought second-hand, through the medium of his wife, from the *anderûns*, for, as a rule, the best specimens from the mines of Madan, near Nishapur, are sent direct to Europe by the hands of agents, or are bought by the Persian nobility. Naib-us-Saltana, the Shah's brother, is a great connoisseur in these stones; he showed me one lately of such unique size and colour that he estimated it to be worth ten thousand pounds.

We were deep in the choice of turquoises when the two phantoms of a short while back re-entered the shop. I recognised the ornament in the *ruhband* of the first, who seated herself close to us, whilst an assistant showed her some stones. A kind of magnetic attraction drew my eyes towards her, in spite of myself.

"Do you like these pale turquoises?" asked Yvonne of me. "They are a kind of talisman, upon which are engraved the names of the Imams, and certain magical formulas. You can get them for a mere song here, for the Persians only care for the dark blue variety, which cost as much in Teheran as they would in Europe. And yet they come from quite near by, from the Nishapur mines. Did you know that these mines are said to be on the site of ancient tombs, and that the turquoises themselves are supposed to be the bones of the dead, transformed thus by the gradual metamorphosis of slow, geological processes?"

"Mirza told me," I replied, "that they brought luck, and that their name, '*firuza*,' means happy. He also warned me to be very careful in buying them, and never to take those kept by the dealers in the moist seclusion of earthen vessels, for these, he says, are 'sick' turquoises, which, when brought in contact with the dry, open air,

lose their deep shade of blue and become paler and paler until, at last, they ' die ' altogether, and . . . "

I broke off abruptly. The phantom lady just beside me had, with a coquettish movement common enough in this delightful country, lifted a corner of her veil, as if the better to examine some jewel—lifted it just enough to allow me a glimpse of the sad little smile and velvet eyes of Bibi Mâh.

. . . . . .

And at dusk, on the terrace, the Lady-of-the-Velvet-Eyes appeared sadder and more timid even than her wont.

She did not mention Yvonne's name, and scarcely spoke at all, save with her eyes, wherein I read by turns both sympathy and hate.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST *COUP D'ÉTAT*

December 14th, 1907.

THE political situation is becoming hopeless. During the last few days the relations between the Shah and the *Majlis* have grown more and more strained. Mohammed Ali cannot digest the bitter *pilaw* of the Civil List, especially since he has realised that out of his allowance of £120,000 he will have to defray the expenses of the *Anderûn*, the Wardrobe, the Kitchens, the Café, the Gardens, and the Stables. What will be left, after all this, for his Privy Purse and for those presents by means of which alone he can hope to secure the fidelity of those around him? His father, Muzzaffar-ud-Din, poured out buckets of pearls, sacks of turquoises, and other precious stones into the pockets of his favourites, leaving the fabulous royal treasure-house fabulously empty. As for his own villages and his *tuyuls* of Azarbayjan, they were mortgaged on a *post obit* whilst he was still Heir-Apparent.

To enlist the sympathies of the populace for his misfortunes, and to create, also, a useful band of malcontents, he has dismissed five or six hundred of his grooms, muleteers, and camel-drivers from the studs of Veramine. And he has given a free hand to the Palace clique, at whose head is the Amir Bahadur Jang, with, for lieutenants, Shapshal and the important new recruit, Saad-ud-Dowla, whose hatred for the *Majlis* is well known.

KURDISH LOOTERS IN THE REVOLUTION

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Saad-ud-Dowla has dealt a cruel blow to the illusions of the Persian Liberal Party. His long residence in Europe, where he was Commissary of the Persian section of the Paris Exhibition of 1878, and, later, Persian Minister at Brussels, together with his reputation for enlightenment of views, gained him a whole-hearted welcome from the Advanced Party in the Assembly, to which he was elected whilst still an exile at Yazd, where a deputation of his Teherani electors sought him out. A few months ago, however, his conduct was censured by his colleagues, and he was even accused, more or less openly, of treason, upon which, with great indignation, he resigned his position as deputy. The Government faction at once received him with open arms, and offered him the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs, which led to a strike of the officials of this department. The strikers gained the day, and a fortnight afterwards his appointment was cancelled.

Thereupon, beside himself with fury, " he girded his loins with the girdle of Hate, withdrew from the skirts of his clothing of irreligion the hand of trouble and of disorder," and went forth to knock at the Sublime Porte of the Palace.

Many of those whose interests were adversely affected by the Budget came to " confound their head amongst the heads " of the Reactionaries, and when the Cabinet proposed placing the Amir Bahadur and his body of troops, together with Colonel Liakoff and his Cossacks, under the control of the Minister for War—a most natural proceeding, one would have thought—the Shah felt himself sufficiently strong to oppose his veto, obstinately, to the measure.

Consequently, this morning the Prime Vizier has communicated to the Shah the desire of his Ministry to resign, which resignation His Majesty declines to sanction,

refusing, at the same time, to accede to the demand of the *Majlis* for the expulsion of Bahadur and Saad.

So now it is open war between the old power and the new, each of them tottering on its pedestal of clay.

Already, in the Mosque of Sipah-Salar, popular orators are denouncing the treachery of the Shah, and in this morning's issue of *The Powerful Help* the following suggestive lines have appeared :

" How can it be imagined that, having established this sacred Assembly by our blood, we could suffer it to be overthrown ? Nothing shall stand in the way of our acquisition in perpetuity of enduring happiness and eternal honour. It is not to be thought of that we should abandon our design on account of this outcry, or that through the fear of four evil-doers we should flee from the path of loyal men. No ! no ! We of the Persian nation say :

> This feeble fox, whose dog is he,
> That he should so torment the Lion of the World ? "

Monday, December 16th.

The sound of firing in the street roused me with a start in the early hours of yesterday. I jumped up, flung on my fur coat, and rushed out on to the terrace. It turned out to be some of Baghir Khan's men " amusing " themselves.

But their amusement proved something more serious than I at first imagined. They were going to swell the ranks of that force which the Shah is amassing, with the probable aim of marching against the Baharistan, and which, since yesterday, has been encamped on the Artillery Square. This force is composed of widely differing elements, scarcely calculated to increase the prestige of His Kajar Majesty—blackguards of every shade, " Lutis," " Bull-Necks," " Felt Kulas," butchers who have broken out—all the roughs, in short, of the

districts of Sangilaj, Shakál-Abad, and Chala-Maydan, together with the grooms, muleteers, and camel-drivers lately dismissed from the royal service, amongst all which hotch-potch Bahadur has drafted in the men of his own regiment.

So the storm has burst; the Shah has unmasked his batteries.

Proceedings were opened by a skirmish. Yesterday morning a band of a hundred roughs, under the command of Sani-i-Hazrat, and Muktadir Nizam, the Superintendents of the Arsenal, rushed into the Square of the Baharistan, and began firing upon the door of the Parliament House. They were easily repelled with revolver shots by a handful of Nationalists, but retreated in their fury upon the Salmiya College, with the intention of massacring the inoffensive professors. And from there they returned to their comrades on the Artillery Square.

The National Assembly met at once, and discussed the measures to be adopted, and it was decided to send a message to the Shah, requesting him to order the dispersion of the agitators. The Shah's uncle, Zill-us-Sultan, was present at the meeting, and was selected to be the bearer of this message to His Majesty, in company with Ala-ud-Dowla. He did not treat the matter seriously, and replied, "Better entrust my brother, Naib-us-Saltana, with your message; he will meet with a more cordial reception than I should do!" In point of fact, Zill-us-Sultan is not a *persona grata* at the Palace, where he is accused of pandering to the *Majlis* in the hope of one day ascending the throne.

In view of his refusal, Ala-ud-Dowla undertook the delicate mission, with his brother, Muin-ud-Dowla. But tidings soon reached the Assembly that their two messengers had been ordered into exile by the Shah, and were even then leaving the town under escort.

The insulted and angry Assembly rose as one man to protest. The President, brother to the two victims, then spoke as follows :—

" From the day of my election to the *Majlis*, I have never uttered one word against the Government, and I have always hoped for a union between the people and the State. Nevertheless, His Majesty, a few days back, inveighed against me and against Ala-ud-Dowla. I held my peace on the matter, and here are Ala-ud-Dowla and Muin-ud-Dowla sent into exile because they wished to oppose the instigators of trouble and disorder. I consider, therefore, that my honour is involved in this, that I should follow, until I am killed, the road on which I have started. And I have not the slightest fear of all these tumultuous happenings. Our task is to safeguard the rights of an entire country, and we must, therefore, continue to debate with firmness and courage, and go through to the end with the consideration of the duties which are incumbent upon us."

Various deputies followed, with speeches urging a united resistance against reaction.

One deputy drew attention to the fact that Colonel Liakoff had refused the help of the Cossacks asked for by the *Majlis*.

Meanwhile, the partisans of Liberty assembled within the Baharistan and in the adjacent Mosque of Sipah-Salar and the square in front of it. Mirza Jafar, ordinarily of a peaceful turn of mind, and who had never used a weapon of offence other than his most voluble tongue, determined to join the Volunteers, and borrowed from me a revolver, which he stuck bravely in his belt. Professional duty, curiosity, and the interest with which the cause of Liberty always inspires me, led me to follow him. The Street of the Tulip-bed was deserted, but when we reached the Baharistan Square we found a crowd of three or four

thousand people surging behind the hastily erected *sangars*—barricades.

The Powerful Help, with an ingenuousness thoroughly Eastern, thus describes the scene :

" More than fifty thousand men, most of them armed, were roaring like lions and mutually exciting each other by the ebullition of their wrath ; they were awaiting with impatience the orders of the Assembly which was sitting."

The walls and roofs all round displayed the same martial appearance.

And all this crowd seemed delighted to see me. Bows and smiles met me on every hand—their vanity was tickled by the presence of a European, above all of a Frenchman. A Russian would, doubtless, have been less well received here, whereas, in the Artillery Square, where the mullas are rousing the spirit of fanaticism, all Franks would have been looked upon with disfavour, unless they were compatriots of Liakoff, and Cossacks.

Isfandiar was there, organising the defence and instructing the Volunteers. It was curious to see an aide-de-camp of the Shah acting in this capacity. Nor was he the only one ; Zahir-us-Sultan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Volunteers, is a cousin of His Majesty's and holds a post at Court ; with him were, also, a son of Zill-us-Sultan and the son of Harun-ar-Rashid.

I entered the court of the Baharistan with the Mirza. There the faces were less pugnacious, those who had taken refuge within its precincts had felt the need of a wall between themselves and possible danger. They were examining their arms, to assure themselves that they would not fail them at the critical moment. " Uneasiness was written in legible characters upon their pallid foreheads."

Within the Baharistan itself things were quieter. The ushers, armed to the teeth, looked mysterious and for-

midable. Busy servants were hastening about with cups of tea and *kalyans*, their guns slung over their shoulders and their poignards in their belts; and those who guarded the slippers at the door of the Chamber of the Assembly recognised me and presented arms—ancient blunderbusses, doubtless of more danger to their owners than to their enemies.

As is the case with European Parliaments, a certain proportion of the Assembly Chamber is reserved for the public. I threaded my way through the crowd, and arrived just in time to witness the sensational entry of a messenger from the Palace, to announce that the Shah had summoned the Ministers, and that, on their arrival, he had had them arrested and placed under guard, out of the way, by the men of Bahadur Jang, whilst the Premier, Nasir-ul-Mulk, had been loaded with chains and shut up alone in a room apart, where, doubtless, he would be strangled any minute.

For a moment the news was stupefying. Such audacity on the part of Mohammed Ali was quite unlooked for. To act thus he must have had the assurance of some strong, sustaining force at his back. It was well known that the Palace was full of armed men. It was known, too, that Liakoff was there, with another Russian officer and a detachment of the Cossack Brigade. In many minds the idea that Russia was taking an active hand in the game gave rise to the gravest fears.

Prudence of action was, above all things, necessary at this juncture. The Assembly, therefore, decided to send at once to His Majesty a deputation, consisting of an ulema and ten deputies, to ascertain his intentions, and, if possible, point out to him the danger of the step he had just taken, and warn him that it would be necessary for him to renew his oath of fidelity to the Constitution.

The deputation departed, and the House rose, and

although the Members had agreed to await the return of their envoys, they ended by dispersing. A wind of indecision and of fear swept over the Baharistan, and all the splendid promise, all the ardent intentions of the afternoon were driven before it into the gathering night, like dead leaves eddying down an autumn gale. Each man prudently returned to his home. The deputation itself left no trace behind it.

During the evening, whilst we were all busily engaged at the Legation composing and deciphering telegrams, details of the day's happenings reached us.

About five o'clock, on the arrival of Nasir-ul-Mulk at the Palace, as, by the Shah's orders, he was being put under arrest, he found opportunity to breathe into the ear of the servant who accompanied him : " Fly thou to the British Legation and tell them there that I shall be put to death five hours after sunset." The faithful servant mounted his horse, and sped away to find the English Chargé d'Affaires.

A few moments later two horsemen left the Legation at full gallop. One, the Oriental Secretary, repaired to the Palace, to protect the life of Nasir-ul-Mulk, the other set off for the Russian Legation, to inform the Czar's Minister of this step, for, since the Convention, the two Powers always act in concert.

The sudden arrival at the Palace of the Oriental Secretary, in mufti, his riding-whip in his hand, created some stir. The news spread like wildfire, reassuring the imprisoned Ministers, disquieting everybody else.

The Shah was in the Hall of the Diamonds, with the Amir Bahadur and a few courtiers, extremely pleased with himself and his daring action.

" May I be your sacrifice ! " said Bahadur. " They are terrified ; there is no more *Majlis*. Say but the word,

and this very night I will have them all arrested—if it be the Will of Allah! They are terrified, and have dispersed of themselves, seeking refuge in their own houses. Even the *Anjumans* have not stirred."

As he spoke a message was brought to His Majesty, to the effect that the Secretary of the British Legation had an urgent communication to make to him.

His Majesty kept the Secretary waiting for a quarter of an hour, and then sent word to him that he would receive him in the Garden of the Gulistan, in spite of the lateness of the hour—it was now past seven o'clock—and of the chilly temperature.

The interview was brief. Mohammed Ali appeared to be in an extremely good temper. He kept repeating, as if to himself, Bahadur's words, " They are terrified ! "—and slashed at the shrubs in the *parterre* with his gold-handled stick set with rubies.

He declared that he had no reason to complain of Nasir-ul-Mulk nor of the other Viziers. He wished them no evil ; he accepted their resignation, they were free to go wherever they pleased. Secretly he was raging, and was not without uneasiness lest his orders with regard to the Premier might have been forestalled and the man already dead.

When the Oriental Secretary left the Palace he took with him Nasir-ul-Mulk, whom two *gholams* of the British Legation were told off to escort as far as Rasht, whither he departed this morning before sunrise.

The last of our telegrams last night, therefore, ran as follows : " The Shah is master of the situation ; the Ministry is no more ; the Assembly has dispersed ; the *Anjumans* are silent. Apparently the *Coup d'État* has been successful."

. . . . .

As I returned home I caught sight of Baghir Khan, alighting from his carriage ; a dozen of his men on horseback saluted him with a volley. It was victory !

I was roused several times during the night by the sound of firing. It came from the Artillery Square. The royal " troops " were encamped there, and to keep up their spirits, food and alcoholic drinks were served out to them. Cover thy face, O orthodox Mulla Ibrahim ! The amateur soldiers, delighted at the possession of rifles, were firing them into the air.

I expected this morning to hear that the Shah had caused the Baharistan to be occupied and the Nationalist leaders to be arrested, and that the *Majlis* was a thing of the past. But it was quite otherwise. The Shah, impressed, no doubt, by the action of the British Legation, has not had the courage to follow up his victory ; the Assembly has been sitting since the small hours, and the Volunteer forces have been re-formed under the command of Zahir-us-Sultan and Isfandiar.

At the same time, a state of siege has been proclaimed, Liakoff is appointed Military Governor of Teheran, the bazars are closed, telegraphic communication ditto—and we should be cut off entirely from the rest of the world were it not that the Indo-European Telegraph Company has kindly put its lines at the service of the Legations.

And in spite of all this, the Europeans here are not in the least alarmed, and take but little interest in what is going on all round them. Only the commercial element grumbles at the stoppage of business ; but no one thinks of a massacre as in the least degree possible.

CHAPTER IX

THE OPINIONS OF MIRZA JAFAR

December.

"THE *Kaaba* of Desire, the Centre of Fortune, in a word, the holy *Majlis*," said Mirza Jafar to me, "has been my home since Monday. Like my brothers in Liberty, I would gladly have given my heart to death in defence of the Constitution!"

Death had not desired his heart, but he was worn out with fatigue, having spent several nights without sleep.

I asked him for news of Isfandiar. He was still very "fit," it appeared, and had displayed marvellous courage. Although the danger had been of an extremely vague character, since the two factions had never actually come to blows and had wisely kept safely to their respective positions, the Mirza was unwearied in his praises of the warlike valour of the Nationalists.

"Verily the Persian nation has displayed the highest degree of courage!" he said. "She has shown the stuff whereof she is made. The understanding is thunderstruck, and asks where this nation can possibly have acquired such knowledge, this nation which hitherto has known nothing, and which had never before set foot upon such a path. Children of a night, how have they contrived to cover a distance of a hundred years? The eyes of the stars looked on them bewildered, and strangers were amazed. Happy the land which has such children! Glory to the father and the mother who beget such sons!

"The possessors of riches and honour were not left

TAGHI ZADA

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behind. Taking their money in their hands, they scattered it in such a manner that, in two or three hours, in spite of the bazars being closed, everything necessary for the food of twenty thousand men was made ready. They cooked *pilaws* flavoured with saffron and a thousand other delicate dishes, and they enjoyed the good things of this world to the full. And everyone assented to that verse of the Koran which says: "Verily Allah hath purchased of the true believers their souls and their substance, promising them enjoyment of Paradise; on condition that they fight for the cause of Allah, whether they slay or be slain, the promise for the same is assuredly due by the law and the gospel and the Koran."

The Mirza's excitement increased with the sound of his own words, which rang out like a blare of war-trumpets; the atmosphere of the revolution had transformed him. It is true that he was out of reach of danger at the moment, and doubtless the presence of one of the "Bull-Necks" from the Artillery Square would have frozen the speech within his throat.

As a matter of fact, from what I could gather, his heroes had not been so particularly heroic. No more so, indeed, than the gloomy Reactionaries. At the same time it must be admitted of the Nationalists that if they did not attack the Reactionaries, it was because their leaders, with Taghi-Zada at their head, exhorted them to calmness, and advised them not to put themselves in the wrong, and to conduct themselves in a civilised manner, in contrast to the sanguinary brutes on the Artillery Square. But it must also be admitted that a terrified prudence, or a prudent terror, had been the order of the day in both camps.

But he went on:

"At night the cold froze the water, but patriotism warmed our hearts, and an armed multitude kept guard, gun on shoulder, cartridges in belt, on the walls and

terraces of the Baharistan and of the mosque and the College of Sipah-Salar. When day returned everyone remained at his post, and, like so many butterflies, patrolled incessantly around the splendour of the *Majlis*, keeping watch and ward on every side. A mosquito could not have escaped the general vigilance ! "

If I had not applied the brake, Allah alone knows how far the eloquence of this true son of Persia would have carried him. So long as he was not pinned down to the description of precise details, so long as he was allowed to reel off the visionary mirages of his own brain, he was never at a loss ; but when I approached him with concrete questions born of my European and positive need of the actual truth, he became disconcerted, irritated, and absolutely incapable of giving any clear answer. And this is typical of the state of mind of the greater number of Persians. From one point of view it is an enviable condition, since it is pleasant to be able to lull oneself with illusions and dreams ; but it explains the slow growth here of progress, and the lack of real comprehension of the spirit of the Constitution.

For if the Persian takes pleasure in these mirages, he is too intelligent not to realise, in his cooler moments, that they are after all mirages—deceptive visions. *Drûg*—Lies !

He lies to himself, as he lies to others, through an inborn need of lying. But this " Lie," under the sun of Iran, is not the ugly thing it is beneath our paler suns. It is the natural product, in part, of a general system of tyranny that has made the perversion of the truth a necessity, an institution, and in part, also, of the mental fertility of this people of Poets, which has endowed their imagination with the wings of romance. In conversation together, Persians take it for granted that " all men are liars," without attaching to this fact any serious issue or any deep personal affront.

Of course there are—above all among the Young Persians—numerous and wonderful exceptions to prove this rule. Their existence, indeed, is one of the characteristics of the new movement.

One of the favourite themes of Mirza Jafar is the baseness of the conduct of Russia. Before the Anglo-Russian Agreement she was openly hostile to the Liberal movement, her sole aim being to hasten the disintegration of Persia, so that this country might, in the words of a time-honoured expression, " fall into her hand like a ripe fruit." Since the Agreement of non-intervention in Persian affairs she has feigned neutrality, but secretly her agents have been supporting the Shah and the Reactionaries. As for England, for whom formerly no eulogy was great enough, he now avoids speaking of her, lest he should criticise too harshly one who, he yet hopes, may recognise her mistake, and give to the Young Persians that support which rendered possible their first success. The Assembly has, on several occasions, approached the British Legation lately, " to ascertain whether she would not in some way or other give assistance to the cause of reform," but the British Chargé d'Affaires gave it clearly to be understood " that he would do nothing of the kind, and would do all in his power to prevent the Legation from being forced into taking any part whatever in the struggle."

Russia, England, and the Reactionary Party are, therefore, all tarred with the same brush, according to the Mirza.

" *Inshallah!* we will yet triumph over all of them ! " he cried, and he read me the following paragraph from *The Powerful Help :*

" The minds of those who have unyielding ill-luck are overturned, and the door of the understanding is closed on them. They set foot on the road of action and thought with their fists to fight the sword, with slings to oppose

the cannon. Allah has desired to put the Persians to the test and to establish these holy foundations, which will be firmer than Aaram jir, in order that perverse ideas shall not dare to encounter them, and to the end that those who have entered into an Agreement to divide between them this water and this earth of Persia may understand the position of affairs, and that they may know that the conquest of Persia can only be achieved at such high cost as shall leave them no profit. We may well say here :

It is the tail of the lion, beware, play not therewith ! "

That which put the crowning touch to the exasperation of Mirza Jafar and of all the Nationalist Party was the understanding arrived at between the representatives of England and Russia to keep Mohammed Ali upon the throne, whilst from all quarters, both in Teheran and in the provinces, messages had been sent demanding the deposition, the assassination even, of the Shah, his courtiers being warned at the same time that if they remained faithful to him their houses would be pillaged and burnt and their families massacred. The two diplomats had agreed that to keep the Shah on the throne " was the only chance of preventing Persia from falling still deeper into the slough of anarchy," for " should he be removed there would be the prospect of a long Regency, and all disinterested Persians are agreed in looking on a Regency as being as unworkable as a Republic."

A Republic ! That would certainly be the form of government least suited to the Persian masses, accustomed to bow before the Shadow of God, the Padishah Protector of Islam. And yet, during the last few days, an *Anjuman* and a few deputies, meeting together in secret, have proclaimed a Republic, drawn on to do so, doubtless, by the " mirage " !

CHAPTER X

ON THE ARTILLERY SQUARE

DURING these troubled days Bibi Mâh has given no sign of life. I have been very much occupied and rarely at home, so that possibly I may have missed seeing her signal. But, on the other hand, I have seen Baghir Khan almost every day, and in a new, if not a favourable light.

On Wednesday, 18th December, I went to the Artillery Square, although this was scarcely a prudent thing to do, to ascertain how things were going with the Royalist faction. He was there with Mulla Ibrahim, surrounded by a knot of roughs of the worst description, to whom he was confiding his amiable intentions. "We will destroy the *Majlis!*" he cried, "and the carpets whereon they sit we will give as pack-saddles to the donkeys of Veramine!"

His auditors signified their acquiescence in these sentiments by discharging their guns into the air with a torrent of fearful oaths. Some women of doubtful reputation among the bystanders uttered cries of terror; a harmless spectator on a neighbouring terrace, struck by a stray bullet, staggered, fell over, and smashed his skull on the stones of the square.

A chorus of children's voices coming from the Nasiria Avenue drew the attention of the indifferent crowd from this tragic incident. It was a file of young scholars from a religious school, the eldest not more than fourteen at the most. With most serious mien, in their long black

coats and astrachan *kulas* adorned with a gilded Lion and Sun, they were singing in unison, like a canticle, this phrase, reiterated times without number: "*Azádi namikhaim*!" ("We do not want Liberty!") And no one seemed to see the comedy of it—or the tragedy! They were greeted with shouts, and there were fresh volleys of firing, then a more definite response to the chanting: "*Mashruta namikhaim!*" ("We want no Constitution!")

I retreated behind a knot of Cossacks who stood holding their horses at the corner of the square, between the Street of the Tulip-bed and the Imperial Bank. Their presence was certainly necessary, for the roughs were attacking the passers-by, menacing them with their poignards and robbing them of money, watches, *kulas*, and *abas*. They might not, perhaps, have ventured upon treating me in like manner, so powerful is European prestige, but it would have been madness to have tempted alike their fanaticism and their cupidity.

I was not the only one to take refuge in this quiet corner among the Cossacks; I recognised, among others there, two young men whom I had already come across in the Baharistan—two Liberals; they saluted me. One was clad in the long khaki *sardari* of the small shopkeeper, and was smoking a *chibuk*, which he kept handing to a Cossack beside him, taking turn and turn at it with the soldier. The other wore a black *sardari* of more modern cut, and sported a linen collar and a buttercup-yellow tie. Like his companion, he was fraternising with the Cossacks, offering them cigarettes, and conversing with one of them in low tones. They were obviously emissaries of the *Majlis*, charged with the task of probing the soldiers of Liakoff. Isfandiar had told me that a portion of the Brigade would go over to the Nationalists if it came to fighting, and that this was the reason why the

FIRST COUP D'ETAT. MULLA PREACHING IN THE ARTILLERY SQUARE

(FROM A PERSIAN NEWSPAPER)

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Shah had not dared to attack the Parliamentary faction, and this incident seemed to confirm his statements. One of the soldiers swore by the Imams, that if they were ordered to march against the Baharistan, he would fire into the air.

Through the loopholes in my bulwark of horses and men I could see Mulla Sayyid Ibrahim, mounted on a wooden platform which served him as rostrum, but the hubbub of the excited crowd prevented my hearing more than a fragment here and there of what he was saying. One phrase was constantly repeated, like a *leit motiv*, and upon that he so raised his voice that it reached my ears distinctly: "We desire the religion of the Prophet, the religion of the Imam Ali, Commander of the Faithful, and we have no more need for the Assembly than for the Constitution!"

"*Mashruta namikhaim!*" echoed the "Bull-Necks."

"*Azádi namikhaim!*" chanted the school-children.

And the tumult drowned the voice of the holy man.

But during a sudden lull these sublime words rang out through the silence: "If ye drink wine, if ye give yourselves up to gambling and adultery, murder, and every form of crime, the All Merciful will pardon you, but Allah keep you from becoming partisans of the Constitution, friends of the friends of the *Majlis!* Rather, do ye kill them in as great numbers as possible! Kill especially the young men, who have drawn their education from European sources; kill whosoever weareth a starched collar and carrieth a stick! For such an one is a follower of the Europeans and their devilries, and the law requires that he shall be killed! We desire the religion of the Prophet!"

The two young Constitutionalists, too certain of the protection of their comrades in smoking, the Cossacks, had pushed forward a few steps, the better to hear what

was being said, and, carried away by the monstrosity of Ibrahim's words, had lost all sense of prudence. The starched collar of the one, of a dazzling whiteness, gleamed like a standard, the standard of the Constitution. Suddenly the eyes of the mulla lighted upon it, and remained fixed upon the wearer, as if fascinated. His mouth remained open, in an invocation to Allah, and with his finger he pointed out to the crowd the hated emblem. An indescribable stampede followed. In a moment a hundred blows fell on the unfortunate " Starched-Collarite," who sank down, bleeding, his skull shattered, all covered with brains. The sight of blood rousing the savage instincts of the roughs, they fell, like vultures, upon the still warm body, one tearing off his clothes, another appropriating his money, a third taking his watch, down to his very shoes, whilst a small school-boy, derider of liberty, took possession of his stick, to which, by means of the yellow tie, stained now with blood and brains, he fixed the emblematical starched collar, which he raised towards heaven as a trophy. The Cossacks, his friends of a moment before, looked on unconcernedly, smoking the while *his* cigarettes.

A blind rage seized me ; I sprang at the Cossacks, angrily, gnashing with rage, to force my way through to the victim ; but they held me back by brute force, pinning me against the wall, alive to their protective duties in the case of a European.

I could no longer see the dead man, but his executioners were clearly visible. The " Bull-Necks," the " Lutis," the " Felt Kulas " filed now in front of the quivering corpse, and in order to have a share in this *meritorious* murder, each one inflicted a fresh wound with poignard thrust or rifle shot, howling blasphemies the while.

And amongst them came Mulla Ibrahim, the descendant of the Prophet. He cleared a way for himself, and seizing

the poignard of a "Luti," he brandished it, crying, "O Mussulmans! be ye all witness, and bear witness at the last day of judgment, before my ancestor the Prophet, that I am the first to tear out the eyes of the supporters of the Constitution!" And he stooped over the corpse.

I saw no more, for the Cossacks who held me pushed me along the wall up to the door of the Imperial Bank, which was slipped half open to admit me.

There the kindly Englishmen of the staff consoled me with cheering words and a reviving whisky and soda. Aladdin had thus transported me in a flash from the most savagely Asiatic scene to one most comfortably European . . . . and I was not sorry!

Echoes of the riot reached us from time to time. The bloodthirsty wretches had not contented themselves with their first victim: a young man of Zanjan, Mirza Anáyat, had met with the same fate, on the flimsy pretext that one man had accused him of several attempts, in female disguise, on the life of Ibrahim, whilst another asserted him to be a Babi—the real motive for the murder being his thick gold watch-chain and the money he had about him. A certain Ali Agha had been seriously wounded because he was—a banker! Personal vengeance of a debtor this, without a doubt!

Night had fallen, and comparative peace was restored to the Artillery Square. There was nothing now to be heard, except a few shots from various quarters. In the unsettled condition of things the town was liable to sudden panics, which drove the inhabitants indoors for safety, and from behind the protecting walls of their houses they discharged their rifles into the air, as a sign that they were armed, the charges being fired in quick succession to give the impression of numbers, both of arms and of men. Then, curiosity overcoming fear, out

they came again into the streets, to see what was happening.

Instead of making straight for home, down the Street of the Tulip-bed, the nearest way, I crossed the Artillery Square towards the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, intending to call on Yvonne and make sure that she was all right. The Square was almost deserted now, scarcely a soul was to be seen among the tents of the Shah's supporters, except the cooks—lent, it is said, by the Palace—who were busy preparing, in enormous saucepans over improvised ranges, the sumptuous feast, well seasoned with wine and *arak*, which was to restore the energies spent in the service of Reaction.

When I reached the other side of the Square, and before I passed into the Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, the sound of shouting and firing drew me to the entrance of the Square of Exercise. There, by the lurid light of braziers, which had all the appearance of bonfires, I saw, hanging by their feet, their arms swinging loosely, two naked, mangled bodies, the unrecognisable remains of the victims of Mulla Ibrahim. The curious crowd, gathered on the great Square from every quarter, were gazing at this heartrending spectacle, listening to the exaggerated and boastful accounts of the murderers, punctuated by the shots with which these miserable butchers shattered yet more the bodies of their prey.

And "*Mashruta namikhaim!*" cried the "Bull-Necks."

And "*Azádi namikhaim!*" chanted the little scholars.

THE MURDER OF THE STARCHED-COLLARITE

(FROM A PERSIAN NEWSPAPER)

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CHAPTER XI

AND AFTER

December 25th.

THE Constitutionalists have won. The bands of monsters that occupied the Artillery Square have dispersed. A new ministry has been formed, and the Shah has retreated into the *anderûn*, where none but women and eunuchs can approach him.

I am so disgusted with the grisly scenes of the past week that I can feel no further interest in the fate of Persia. Isfandiar and the Mirza may say what they will to assure me that barbarism is the monopoly of the Reactionaries, I cannot but feel convinced that the brothers of the Reactionaries have, at heart, the same instincts. And I remain dejected and disillusioned. I have not been up on to the terrace again—I have not again seen Bibi Mâh.

Isfandiar thinks me unjust towards his countrymen. After all, I have no right to judge them so harshly ; I am forgetting the horrors which bathed my own land in blood, not so very long ago, during the great Revolution, the Reign of Terror, and, more recently still, the Commune of 1871. It is impossible to judge of a nation by these exceptional outbursts.

Yes, this is true. Perhaps Isfandiar is right. He himself would not be capable of such cruelties, although he comes of a nomadic mountain stock, as yet untouched by civilisation. Left to his own instincts, man is naturally cruel. The spread of education becomes, therefore, a most sacred duty.

Yes, Isfandiar is right. And yet . . .

But why am I still filled with such nausea? Why am I still prostrated?

At this Christmas time I should forget all this, and heed only Him Who brought to us the divine message of peace, of pardon, and of love.

CHAPTER XII

OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE

January, 1908.

EVERYTHING is going on splendidly. The victory remains with the partisans of Liberty, with no regular fighting.

Much powder has been burned, many warlike detonations have rent the air, but, on the whole, except for the murders on the Artillery Square and a few deaths here and there from stray bullets, it has been a bloodless victory, a peaceful conquest. And how up-to-date in its conduct for the country of Nadir Shah! Fancy, the telegraph—not as yet the wireless—the telegraph has taken the place of the cannon! Listen to *The Powerful Help*:

"Messages flowed in to such an extent that the telegraph operators were quite overwhelmed. Two hundred thousand words were cabled in two days. By this means one learned that almost everywhere the nation had seized every department of State administration, the arsenals, the artillery, the post office, the military stores, and in many cases even the reins of local government. Not only was the Assembly approached in this way, but the Shah himself was censured severely, and warned to beware of the possible consequences of the extraordinary events which were taking place."

It was by telegram also that the *Anjuman* of Tabriz proclaimed the fall of the Shah, by telegram again that

the heads of Shiite Islam excommunicated Mulla Ibrahim and other Reactionary priests.

Mohammed Ali might well have lost his throne but for the decision of the " Powers of the Agreement " to do their utmost to avert his deposition. So he has been obliged to show himself amenable, and to swear a fresh oath of fidelity to the Constitution, the latter of little value, indeed, since he abjures his oaths as easily as a monkey cracks cocoanuts.

Here is the exquisite document of Oriental duplicity which he wrote and signed on the night of the 13th Zil-Qaada, 1325, on the fly-leaf of a Koran :

" On account of the disturbances which have taken place of late at Teheran and in the provinces, the nation has felt mistrust born within her : she imagined we were ready—Allah forbid !—to break the oath we had sworn, and to oppose the Constitutional law. Therefore, to dispel this mistrust, to reassure all minds, we swear upon this glorious Word of God that we will protect the Constitution and the laws of government : we will assist them with the most scrupulous care, and will never neglect them.

" Whosoever shall act against the Constitution shall be severely punished.

" If ever I violate my oath, if ever I go against it, I shall be responsible in the sight of the Master of the glorious Koran, in accordance with my oath to the Deputies. (Signed) " MOHAMMED ALI."

Upon the other fly-leaf of the same Koran the Deputies inscribed the following oath, signed by themselves :—

" His Majesty, the Shahin-Shah Mohammed Ali Shah, Kajar—may Allah grant him to reign for ever—on account of the outbreak of trouble and sedition and to dissipate the distrust of the entire nation, has sworn upon the

Koran, the glorious Word of God, that he will be the guardian and protector of the Constitution and of the laws of government.

" Wherefore we, the undersigned Deputies, swear upon this glorious Word of God that, so long as the laws of government and the Constitution are protected by His Majesty, so long as he keeps them and will fulfil them, we will not betray him in any way ; we will respect the privileges and rights of our just and to-be-obeyed Padishah, according to the Constitution.

" If we go back on the oath which we swear to-day, we shall be responsible before Allah and before His Prophet."

CHAPTER XIII

BASTINADO

A POLITICAL quiet, relatively speaking, broods over the town, but the antagonism between the Shah and the *Majlis* renders the Government powerless, and in the provinces anarchy reigns supreme, as it would reign in Teheran if it were not policed by the Cossacks.

One hears of nothing but the spoliation of caravans at the very gates of the towns, of the robbery of couriers, of assassinations of every kind.

The other night some thieves or assassins entered the house of the Vizier for Foreign Affairs, by means of ladders. The sentinels on guard at the door put them to flight.

As for the fatally compromised Mulla Ibrahim, in fear of the well-deserved vengeance which he feels to be hanging over his head like the sword of Damocles, he went in search of *bast* (sanctuary) to the Russian Legation, where he was promptly shown the door, after which he sought refuge with certain other mullas in the Marvi Mosque, close to the Palace. It is said that the Grand Mujtahids of Kerbela, the sovereign Pontiffs of Shiite Islam, have excommunicated him. He is none the less popular with the Reactionary Party, who have certainly a curious way of " desiring the religion of the Prophet " !

Baghir Khan has been visiting him in his sacred *bast*. Their friendship seems closer than ever. A bad augury this for poor Bibi Mâh !

But Baghir will not pay his friend another visit yet awhile! For some reason, of which I am ignorant, the Shah, from the inner mysteries of the Royal *Anderûn* sent an order to his chief executioner to administer to him a severe bastinado. He was sent for to the Palace at an early hour, and proceeded thither joyfully, little thinking what was awaiting him there! He was brought back an hour later, in a dead faint, his feet like so much pulp. He desired autocracy—he has been served a dish of it—boiling hot!

CHAPTER XIV

A CLOUD OVER THE MOON

January 31st.

YESTERDAY, on the terrace, I saw Bibi Mâh—for the last time, I fear!

The weather was snowy, and the boisterous wind had carried away the black silk scarf which is our preconcerted signal, blowing it down into my court, exactly in front of the *talar*. I thanked the wind for its message; without it I should never have seen the signal, for I had not dreamt of exploring the terrace in such bitter cold weather, more especially since Bibi Mâh had not shown herself for so long a time.

I had not been two minutes on the terrace when the well-known sound of trailing silks on the other side of the wall fell softly on my ear, quickening my heart-beats; and then the head of Bibi Mâh emerged slowly, like a moon rising on the horizon, much enveloped in woollen shawls, this chilly moon!

She swept me caressingly with a languorous and velvety glance, drowned in sorrow. She had so much to say to me that she could not speak. Our conversations, indeed, are for the most part wordless, and I am accustomed to interpreting the expression of her eyes.

She was extremely unhappy. Turkan Khatun was persecuting her . . . I knew it, alas!

Her eyes filled with tears, which she restrained with some difficulty, then she tried to speak, but two words

only—" Mulla Ibrahim ! "—broke from her lips, and she burst into bitter sobbing.

These two words told me all. In spite of her abhorrence of this man, they were going to give her to him in marriage, like a little slave girl who had no say in the matter.

If it had not been for the wall between us, I must have taken her in my arms to console her, covering her with kisses, and, who knows, I might have flown with her—far away ! . . . But the wall *was* there, and another wall, also, an almost unscalable one, the " wall of the harem," which enfolds the Moslem woman in its jealous and impenetrable clutches.

" What do I see ? Allah forgive me ! " cried a sharp voice in the neighbouring court. " What ashes are heaped upon our heads ! "

" Fly ! " cried Bibi Mâh, and she disappeared behind the wall.

I stooped quickly ; but not before I had seen and been seen by an old woman of evil appearance, standing, with arms uplifted to heaven, in the very corner of the court where, on my first stroll upon the terrace, I had caught sight of the feminine shadows ; it was the old crone with the lamp who had walked before the phantom of Bibi Mâh on that occasion.

I waited, motionless, a prey to a thousand anxieties as to the fate of the pretty Shiraz girl, who, through my fault, was about to undergo Heaven knew what punishment.

I waited, but no sound came from the house next door. Two pigeons in pursuit of each other came and settled on the spot where so recently Bibi Mâh's hand had rested ; they cooed to each other, not in love now, but in anger, and went for each other like two fighting cocks.

I waited, and the scene of last year unrolled itself again before the eyes of my imagination. Mansur's pigeons were flying there, far up, silvered in the sunlight against

the evening sky, and imperceptibly they dropped to the level of our heads, grown black as bats. Then the vision in the darkening court and the prophetic warning of Mirza Jafar: "He who violates with his glances the sacred privacy of the harem is punished by death!"

I waited—in vain. The wall of the harem had closed upon its prey . . . the rest was a deathlike silence.

The snow began falling, and as I descended sadly from the terrace there seemed to fall also upon my heart, like the dying petals of a rose that drops, the faded lines of the song of Jamshid:

The Lily—her breast—hath stolen Repose from my heart;
The Narcissus—her eye—hath stolen Wisdom from my head;
Oh, my Heart, my Heart, my Heart!
For she is fair as the Moon—
The Moon of the Fourteenth Night!

PART III

FULL MOON

CHAPTER I

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS

February 1st, 1908.

A HORRIBLE day! The sky remains a dreary grey, and it has been snowing again. As I write, at dusk, Jamshid is on the terrace, sweeping away the snow which, under his onslaughts, falls in thundering avalanches on to my poor garden, where it is accumulating in heaps which will soon be the height of a man—at any rate of a small man! The snow-drifts resolve themselves into giant frozen *catafalques*, cubic in form, which rise on either side of a central path cut through the snow, outlining the basin, and surrounded again by other paths following the line of the walls. And they are, indeed, huge grave-mounds, beneath which slumber the roses of Jamshid—who now sings no longer! The deathly silence is only broken by the dull thud of snow-heaps, falling at regular intervals. The effect is most depressing, and it is very cold.

What a day it has been! And still no tidings of Bibi Mâh, since the catastrophe of the day before yesterday; and how am I to obtain any? She will certainly be made to pay dearly for the innocent interviews she has had with me! She will be beaten, without a doubt, and threatened with worse to follow. And it is all my fault!

My fault! And yet I can do nothing to help her, absolutely nothing, except keep quiet and hope that she will forget me. I cannot even let her know how miserable and wretched I am about it all.

Yvonne, who is certainly a friend in need, has gone so far on my behalf as to call on Turkan Khatun, hoping to glean some information for me; but she was not received—in itself a bad omen. This is Islam, this is the harem—silence, mystery, death!

Death! Ah, no, it cannot be death! Surely, surely, they will not kill her for so slight a cause! I am raving! The vile weather, fatigue, and over-wrought feelings have brought me to such a pitch of nervous tension that I am no longer master of myself.

I have no choice; there remains but one thing to be done: write the word "Finis" after the first and only chapter of this story of an Oriental flirtation on a terrace—not even a love-story, just a romance without words, like the "Spring Song" of Mendelssohn—a flirtation of which there is nothing left to me but the memory of a lovely face, its rounded oval shrouded in a mist of veil, and of the startled yet deep and tender gaze of the Lady-with-the-Velvet-Eyes. A sudden cloud has withdrawn this moon from my sky, and my heart is left wounded, but . . . not mortally!

. . . . .

Yes, what a day it has been! I have not even had the consolation of being alone with my sorrows, alone to watch my black butterflies in the garden of my desires!

I had excused myself from duty at the Legation on pretext of indisposition, so that I might give myself up entirely to my wretchedness and await the progress of events with calm despair—a cult in which Yvonne accuses me of morbid enjoyment—when Ali Jan, one of the *gholams* of the Legation, arrived with a note from the Minister, informing me of a serious mishap to our acting Secretary, Vecquincourt, and intimating that he would be personally obliged if my indisposition would permit of my taking

charge of the rescue party. The *gholam* was to give me details of the accident. A horse, ready saddled, waited at my door, together with two Cossacks of the Guard and two *gholams*, armed with long stakes and coils of rope.

I rapidly threw on a fur jacket and sprang into the saddle, whilst Ali Jan gave me an account of what had occurred. It seemed that Vecquincourt, in a fit of ill-temper, had gone off alone for a ride through the snow-covered country; and presumably, as he was galloping aimlessly along, his horse had suddenly lost his footing and slipped into one of those unprotected shafts through which the Persians go down to excavate or repair their *kanáts*—those subterranean conduits by which the water is brought from the hills into the town. A peasant who happened by some lucky chance to be passing that way saw both horse and rider disappear into the snow, and, realising what had occurred, ran to the mouth of the shaft. The horse was on his feet at the bottom, and the rider still kept his seat, but the shaft was so deep that it was useless to think of getting them out without the help of ropes and hauling tackle. Vecquincourt promised him a reward if he would hasten as fast as he could to the French Legation and bring back the necessary assistance.

The peasant was now mounted behind Ali Jan, and pointed out the way as we went. We galloped off, as recklessly as Vecquincourt himself had done, incurring the same risks of being landed in some hidden pitfall, but it was important for us to reach the unhappy man as soon as possible, as there was every chance of his being buried alive through the subsidence of the pit sides, these shafts being just holes dug in the earth, unsupported in any way by brickwork or stone. And if he escaped this danger, there was still the fear that the intense cold might render him insensible.

The endless shroud of snow spread over the vast,

undulating plain, which stretches in a gentle slope to the outlying spurs of the Elbruz mountains, gave to the landscape beneath the leaden sky an aspect of sinister desolation. A keen, icy wind stung our faces, the horses stumbled over the stones and roughnesses of the road, hidden beneath the snow; the solitude was unbroken, save by the packs of dogs and flocks of crows who live on the carcases of animals thrown outside the ramparts by the people of Teheran, in compliance with the police regulations, and who were prowling hungrily about, finding nothing to devour.

Our guide, like the majority of Persians, had only the vaguest notion of distance. He had assured us that "a ten minutes' gallop" would bring us to the shaft. The ten minutes had passed, followed by another ten, and he seemed to be doubtful as to the direction he should take, having no landmark to go by, when my attention was drawn to the left by the sound of barking. A number of dogs appeared to be challenging an invisible prey, a flock of ravens wheeled croaking above them; I guessed that there was our man.

And there he proved to be, at the bottom of a great black hole, still in his saddle, motionless, frozen, despairing of rescue, so long had appeared the time of waiting. His limbs were so numb with cold that when we threw down the rope to him, he could not cling to it with a grasp sufficiently strong to enable us to raise him. We had to haul it in again, and make a noose, which, with some difficulty, he managed at length to slip under his armpits, after which we drew him painfully to the mouth of the shaft. My men hauled in the rope, and its living burden, with a series of jerks, punctuating their efforts with cries of "*Ya Ali*" so noisy that they failed to hear my command of "Stop!"—with the result that our unfortunate comrade's head came with a crash against the bar of

wood that acted as a lever. With a heartrending cry of pain he fainted away, and this further complicated our task with the difficulty of getting his inert body out of the yawning aperture. In the confusion Ali Jan, making a sudden, quick movement, slipped and fell, in his turn, into the hole.

There was consternation on every face. "*Aman!* [Mercy!] the wrath of Allah is upon our heads!" was the cry, and for a moment it seemed as if the men would refuse to interfere further with "the Hand of God."

I am not wanting in coolness when occasion demands it, and I had need of all I possessed at this juncture. At length I managed to soothe the superstitious fears of the men, and poor Vecquincourt was released from the shaft and restored to consciousness, followed closely by Ali Jan, who came out with the agility of a monkey. As for the horse, by whom Vecquincourt set great store, all efforts to extricate him proved useless, in spite of the assistance of a dozen of the neighbouring villagers; he was, moreover, badly wounded in the head, and the sides of the shaft slipping in gradually, through the force of our exertions, were beginning to cover him little by little. He seemed to realise the hopelessness of his case, and gave vent to such harsh and unearthly neighs of distress that we were moved to tears. We had to decide upon putting him out of his misery: the Cossacks fired on him.

His death-neighs are still echoing in my ears; never have I heard anything so terribly symbolic of mortal anguish. They ring like a passing bell, the knell of my Persian adventures, the knell of my dawning passion for Bibi Mâh!

CHAPTER II

"AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT"

IT is too much! I scarcely know how to set down all that has happened. My life has again been shaken—shaken to its foundations, perhaps, even irreparably.

The great god Circumstance is too powerful for us poor mortals; when we find ourselves caught in his toils there is little hope of escape! Not that I am complaining at my capture—not at all; I am merely stating a fact. In my inmost heart I am delighted to open a fresh chapter in the romance so rudely interrupted.

But let me try and arrange in order the mosaic of events.

On Friday, after the thrilling adventure of Vecquincourt's rescue, in spite of my fatigue, and in spite, also, of my black butterflies, I dined with Yvonne, who, knowing my depression over the loss of Bibi Mâh, had made me promise to spend the evening with her. She was so absolutely charming that, by the time Mansur came for me with the *fanus*, she had almost succeeded in consoling me, and I was feeling really more like myself.

It was about eleven o'clock when I left her house, Mansur walking in front, his teeth chattering with the cold, and the great *fanus*—whose dimensions are prescribed by etiquette—hanging from his arm by its metal handle right to the ground, like an enormous illuminated accordion. We hurried along. At the turn of a street we were set upon by some dogs, and I was trying to

drive them off when a silent sledge crossed our path, preceded by a mounted *jalowdar*. This diverted the attention of the beasts, whom hunger renders dangerously bold, and they left us to fly after this new prey.

The scene recalled to my mind those stories of the Russian steppes which, as a child, had so fascinated, even while they terrified me, and which had given me many a nightmare.

When we reached home we had to knock several times before we could rouse the *karauls*. The one who finally admitted us, smothered in sheepskins and armed with a dagger, had none of the suavity of appearance of our good *concierges*—you would have judged him a dangerous brute, ready to cut your throat for daring to disturb his rest. But as I entered he raised his dirty hand with a passive and resigned air to his *kula*, where the Lion and Sun of Persia gleamed in the light of Mansur's *fanus*, and he closed the door behind us with a noisy clang of bolts and bars.

When we reached the court, we were astonished to see a light in the dining-room, and I had scarcely noted this when we observed further some shadowy figures emerging on to the terrace. I called out sharply, "Who's there?" but there was no reply, and the shadows disappeared. We rushed through the snow-mounds to the staircase, and in a second were on the terrace, but there was nothing to be seen there beyond some freshly made tracks across the snow.

Mansur was for rousing the servants and getting in the police. But where would have been the good? The district police are a most inefficient body, and quite useless for catching thieves—if thieves these were—indeed, as often as not they are in league with them, above all in these times of revolution. I decided that it would be better to wait till morning, and then lodge a complaint,

through diplomatic channels, with the Vizier for Foreign Affairs. Besides, I was anxious to get to bed, for I was so dead beat that even the sight of the wall and the terrace where I had seen Bibi Mâh for the last time could scarcely arouse in me any emotion.

I went straight to my room, without having the energy to make a tour of inspection through the dining-room, which the light suggested as the thieves' base of operations. I sent Mansur to investigate instead, and, undressing rapidly, was soon in bed. He returned in a short time, with the news that all my silver plate had disappeared. But my eyes were closing, and I scarcely listened to his tale of woe ; I had a vague idea that he was still there, that he was opening and shutting drawers in search of something, for once he touched me on the shoulder, and asked me whether the Mirza had returned me my revolver, and if so, where I had put it, as he could not find it. Drowsily I pointed out its hiding-place, adding, " Be off with you, do, and put out the light ! " Then I dropped into a sound sleep.

But my day was not to end yet.

At first I was dreaming : I was in a sledge, driving over a snowy steppe. Bibi Mâh, whom I had abducted, was clinging to me in terror, because of the wolves who were pursuing us. All of a sudden the sledge crashed up against a huge stone and was overturned, throwing Bibi Mâh out into a yawning chasm. I tried to get to her assistance, but could not extricate myself from the travelling rugs in which I was enveloped ; in vain I struggled and struggled, straining every nerve to free myself, I remained a prisoner on the ground. Then I began to call for help, and, as I did so, I heard the echo of my cries on the lonely silence.

It was the voice of Mansur that recalled me to reality, saying anxiously, " Sidi, Sidi, what is it ? Art thou ill ? "

I opened my eyes, and saw him standing at the foot of my bed, in night attire, and holding a light.

Dazed by this sudden awakening, it took me some seconds to recollect my scattered senses. Then: "I was dreaming," I replied. "It was a nightmare from all that I have been through to-day. Get me something to drink!"

As he squeezed the juice of a lemon into a glass of *eau sucrée*, he told me that he had been roused with a start by my yells; he thought that I was being murdered, and flew to my assistance, half asleep, and without a thought of arming himself. And he burst out laughing.

"Didn't the servants hear me?" I asked.

"I don't suppose so," he replied. "I fancy the masses of snow in the court must have deadened the sounds. Besides, these cowardly Persians would take good care not to leave the *birûn* if they thought that there was any danger to be faced in the *anderûn*."

When he had gone down to his own quarters, I tried in vain to compose myself to sleep again. As I felt for the matches on the table beside me, my hand touched the cold steel of my revolver barrel. Mansur must have put it there, I remembered. And the good fellow had shown his wisdom; my room was close to the terrace staircase, and quite easy to break into. The thieves who had just visited us might easily return, or others of their kind; such things are of daily occurrence in the present unsettled state of the country. I had never thought of this risk before. What rashness! I felt that I must see to there being a new lock on the terrace door, of which Mansur should keep the key, for the existing one did not inspire me with much confidence—nor did he ever remember to fasten it.

And my imagination conjured up so many possible dangers that at last I almost became frightened. I examined my revolver; it was not loaded. I got up

and found some cartridges. I charged the weapon and got back into bed. The chilly air had done me good, and I once more felt sleepy. As I extinguished the candle my eye fell on the bolt of the door. I ought to have drawn it, but the prospect of having to get up in the morning to admit Mansur when he came in to brush my clothes acted as a strong deterrent. Nonsense ! These fears were ridiculous ! Europeans were safe enough in Persia, whoever else was not.

I had fallen into a doze, one of those uneasy states in which the brain still goes on working and one has the impression of being awake, when, all of a sudden, it seemed to me that I heard steps on the terrace just above my head. I held my breath the better to listen. There certainly *were* steps, but very light ones. The stairs leading from the terrace began to creak. My heart beat violently. I raised my bed-clothes slightly. More creaks. Someone was coming down the stairs !

A cold sweat bathed my forehead. The steps were now coming along the corridor.

I sat up, and my hand felt instinctively for the revolver beside me. I dared not light the candle, for fear of making a noise, for fear also of offering a target to whoever might enter the room. I decided that it must be the thieves returning, perhaps to fetch something which they had forgotten in their flight from the dining-room. I determined to make fast the terrace door as soon as they should be below, and to rouse Mansur, thus catching them like rats in a trap.

The steps had ceased. There was an intense silence, broken only by the throbbing of a pulse in my temples. A piece of furniture near my bed gave a loud crack. Then came a slight sound in the passage, this time in the direction of my room.

Again dead silence.

The objective of the steps appeared to be, not the dining-room then, but my bedroom! And, all at once, there flashed upon me the thought of Baghir Khan. He desired to avenge the honour of Bibi Mâh, and had sent his men to kill me!

That explained why the steps had been overhead. The murderers, coming from the house of Baghir, had scaled the party-wall between our terraces, and the theft of the silver committed during the absence of Mansur and myself had been merely a blind to throw off suspicion. But I was not going to let myself be killed in this way without a struggle!

A hand was tapping its way along the wall, the steps were so light that I could scarcely hear them, despite the tension with which I was listening. I tried to think what would be the best course to pursue, but my mind refused to work. I was like a hunted animal, with nothing but instinct to guide me.

It was the door now over which the hand was groping.

I sat motionless on the edge of the bed, facing it. My fingers gripped the trigger of my revolver. I was ready to fire.

The door opened.

There was a flash from the barrel, followed by a deafening report; then the heavy sound of a body falling and . . . silence!

The silence lasted for some seconds, which seemed to me centuries. I did not move, waiting, as if hypnotised, for the next comer.

Once again it was the voice of Mansur that roused me from this fresh nightmare.

"Is that thou, Sidi?"

"Yes. I have killed him. Quick!"

. . . . .

"Wallah! Billah! Ash amlatek? . . . Mráa . . .!"

In the open doorway, a light in his hand, his eyes starting from his head, Mansur, in his white garment, stood rigid, like the Angel of Death. In his excitement he had forgotten his French. He repeated in Arabic, *"Wallah! Billah! Ash amlatek?"* ("By Allah, what hast thou done?") and pointed to the heap of drapery on the floor. *"Mráa Kataltek!"* ("Thou hast killed a woman!")

My gaze followed the direction of his finger, and a sudden stab, as from a sword, struck through my heart—the stab of a mournful presentiment.

Among the folds of a silken *chadur* there showed slender plaits of black hair. And, although every Persian woman wears a similar *chadur* and almost all of them dress their hair in these same narrow braids, I *knew* that it was *She*.

I had killed Bibi Mâh!

CHAPTER III

THE HEGIRA OF BIBI MÂH

I STOOD rooted to the spot, paralysed and dumb. I would have given anything to have been able to weep, to cry out and to beat my breast, in a word, to have given some lively expression to my despair, to have portrayed in action the warring sentiments which agitated my heart.

Mansur also remained motionless, his eyes alone working, travelling from me to the body and from the body to me. Then he proved himself the better Westerner of us two—that is to say, the more practical.

"Something must be done!" he said, "and at once! A Persian woman dead in thy room! If the Persians discover it they will kill thee. We are not in Tunis here. . . .!"

I understood the world of meaning in these brief sentences; I knew that the fanaticism of the Persians allowed of no trifling with their women on the part of the Unbeliever. But my entire mind was concentrated upon this one fact: I had killed Bibi Mâh. The whole tragedy had magnified my feelings in regard to her. It seemed to me now that I loved her madly, passionately, and that if I too were slain it mattered nothing.

Mansur continued his train of reasoning, unconscious of what was passing in my mind. "At all events we cannot let her stay in thy room! Shall I lift her out on to the terrace—and thou canst—invent—something? There

are no witnesses—no one in the *birûn* can have heard—there is no one stirring there."

I did not heed him; I had flung myself flat on my chest upon my bed, my face buried in my hands.

Unnoticed by me, Mansur had approached the body, and, after feeling carefully, he exclaimed, "Not dead! Her heart is still beating!"

I sprang up. In a moment I was beside him, and with his assistance, as he followed my silent directions, I managed to get off the *chadur* and lay the body upon my bed.

It was indeed she . . . Mâh! The Shadow of Death had given to her face an ethereal serenity, a mysterious transparency which rendered it supernatural . . . she was, in truth, the Moon, the Goddess Tanit, adored by the Carthaginians. Never had I seen her so divinely, so royally beautiful, so truly the Moon of the Fourteenth Night.

The sight of her, and the glimmer of hope raised in my heart by Mansur's words, had restored me to myself; to the stupefaction of the previous moment there succeeded an immediate and pressing need for action. I laid my ear to her heart and listened to its feeble beating. My cheek came in contact with something damp and sticky . . . it was blood from the wound, which I quickly discovered to be in her neck, in the region of the left shoulder, not far from the heart. The flow was slight, and was quickly stopped, my medicine chest furnishing me with all the requisites for a temporary dressing; but nothing that I could do served to revive my beautiful victim. She remained in a deathlike swoon.

Mansur's attitude towards me showed that he knew, or at all events guessed at the state of affairs; whenever our glances met I read in his eyes a sympathetic concern that was quite touching.

For the second time that night he showed himself the more practical of the two. There was not a moment to be lost in saving both Bibi Mâh and myself; at all costs she must be taken away from my quarters. As soon as her absence from the harem was discovered the police would be set on her track, every house in the quarter would be visited. Possibly mine would be exempt from police investigation, owing to its diplomatic privileges, but even then, my own servants would be entrusted with the task of searching it, and there was not a corner of the place in which she could be hidden without their knowledge. I knew quite well what my fate would be if she were found there, and even if *I* were fortunate enough to escape the extreme penalty, a far from likely contingency, judging from precedents, the Khanum would most certainly be killed.

Whilst I was dressing her wound Mansur had been thinking hard, and Allah, Whose mercy and pity are infinite, had revealed to him the ideal hiding-place—none other than the man's own house, which he had taken at the time of his marriage with Nur Jehan.

I quickly reviewed all the objections to this plan: the hour was late, and how were we to convey a limp and helpless body across the greater part of the quarter without attracting attention and risking discovery? And without even going so far as the streets, how were we, in the first place, to get out of the house itself unseen by the *karaûls* who guarded the door? However, in spite of these and all other objections, it seemed the only plan which offered any prospect of safety.

We wrapped Mâh up in her *chadur*, and for further precaution to make believe, in case we were seen, that we were merely carrying a bundle of stuffs, we flung over the *chadur* the Rasht embroidery that formed my bedspread. It was truly a mad adventure, this funeral

march in the dead of night, with this Moslem woman, a stranger to Mansur, almost a stranger to me, whom we bore thus across the quarter, risking our lives at every step.

First of all, there was the steep, narrow staircase to go down ; I supported Bibi Mâh under the armpits, Mansur taking her feet, walked in front. When we reached the bottom he left the precious burden with me, whilst he went to open the entrance door. This was no easy matter ; not only were there great iron bolts, more or less rusty, to be drawn back silently, but also—and herein lay the chief danger—the keys had to be fetched from the very room in which the *karaûls* slept, without rousing them. For anyone but an Arab the task would have been well-nigh impossible ; for the ex-Spahi it was the work of a moment.

The court was quickly crossed, and we reached the street without mishap. It was pitch dark, fortunately, the snow was falling in heavy flakes, and there was no sign of life anywhere.

Once clear of the house, we started off at a rapid pace. The snow beat in our faces, and clung to our feet in great heavy balls. The wind was icy. I had neither overcoat nor hat, but I was insensible of the cold, as well as of fatigue ; my sole thought was to save Bibi Mâh, my most pressing anxiety the fear lest she should have already succumbed and it should be only her corpse that we were carrying away. We stopped from time to time, and I found, to my relief, on each occasion that her pulse was still beating. This discovery put fresh strength into me for the painful journey.

Fate, or the great god Circumstance, had been good to me in some ways, in spite of all my ill-luck just now ; first and foremost, I had Mansur with me—this I owed to my dear mother—then, he had lately married, and thus

possessed a house of his own, and finally, so far there had been no one about, and so we had escaped observation.

It is this linking together of favourable accidents, as if miraculously, and under the guidance of an Invisible Hand, that lays the foundations of great events, and gives colour and a semblance of possibility to the great Mussulman doctrine of Fatalism. Napoleon owed much to the fortunate combination of circumstances, and when at Cairo, crowned with a turban, he presided over some Moslem religious ceremony, counting upon the effect produced to procure him the sovereignty of the East, he was already wholly converted to one of the dogmas of Islam—he believed with all his heart in the Book of Fate.

Maktûb! It is written!

And for me: *Maktûb* that I should love Bibi Mâh; *Maktûb* that I should save her life; *Maktûb* that she should be mine!

I had forgotten all the horror and all the dangers of our present situation. The sound of voices at no great distance along the street recalled me to a sense of the mournful reality. Instinctively we drew in close to the wall, then, as we reached the embrasure of a door, we disappeared within it, to allow whoever might be coming to pass.

The door itself lay below the level of the street, down a flight of steps, and appeared to be sunk into the thickness of the house, between two walls; it was a refuge as ideal as it was unexpected, and I sank down gratefully on to one of the benches cut into the wall on either side of the door, with which a watchful Destiny had provided us. I held Bibi Mâh on my knees, and drew aside the folds of the *chadur*, which met over her face, to give her air. In the darkness I realised rather than saw her features. *Maktûb* that I should fall in love with Bibi Mâh! I laid my hand on her temple to feel if her pulse still beat; at every throb a thrill of joy ran through me. *Maktûb*

that I should save her life! It was good to be in that dark corner out of the snow and the wind!

The voices sounded close at hand now, and so distinct was their utterance that I could follow every word. The speakers were evidently within a few paces of us.

"Then you think he has cheated us?" asked a hoarse voice that strove in vain to lower its tones.

"Yes! the thief! May dogs defile the grave of his mother!" came the reply in gruff accents.

They had reached the doorway by this time. The hoarse voice began again: "He said it was not pure silver, such as our Persian silver, but a base alloy of Frankish manufacture."

They had stopped so close to us that only the length of the steps separated them from us.

"*Drûg!*" ("Lies!") returned the guttural voice. If the Franks are impure, their silver is not so, and they are not clever enough to manufacture a cunning alloy, like our Vizier of the Mint. By the beard of the Prophet, these silver baubles with which the Franks eat are worth four times what that scoundrel gave us for them—may all the Jews of creation ravish his sister!"

"Bad luck! And if we had not been disturbed, there were many other things there worth taking!"

"*Inshallah!* If it please God, we shall return there. The Frenchman often goes out in the evening, and that burnt son of a burnt father, his Sunnite of an Arab, is seldom about."

All this was distinctly interesting. There was no mistaking it, these were *our* robbers!

Mansur had shivered under the insult levelled at him, but he had managed to control himself.

"We will speak of this again. It is too cold now. I am off to bed. *Khuda hafiz!* God keep you!" And the man with the hoarse voice ran off.

" *Khuda hafiz !* " echoed the gruff voice, and its owner descended a step—then, recollecting something, went up again and called out: " Husayn ! Husayn ! My lantern ! " Then he ran after his companion.

We could hear them talking at some little distance.

" Quick ! Let us get away ! " I whispered, and suiting the action to the word, I began mounting the steps with Bibi Mâh in my arms.

But I had scarcely reached the top when the gruff-voiced man was back again. Instinctively, but stupidly, I retreated into my refuge, instead of fleeing upwards, whilst Mansur faced the enemy.

" What are you up to there ? " asked the man, turning his dark-lantern on to him.

" What's your own business ? " retorted Mansur.

" This happens to be my house—I am going home ! "

" Very well. I was waiting for you. I have come for the silver you stole this evening from my master."

" Dog ! " And I heard the peculiar noise caused by the rapid unsheathing of a Persian dagger. At the same instant two bodies came tumbling down the steps and rolled over at my feet.

Fortunately Mansur was uppermost. With one hand he clutched at the naked dagger of his opponent, with the other he grasped the man's throat. Before I had time to interfere the dagger had fallen to the ground. He picked it up, and they both rose to their feet. The dark-lantern, still alight in spite of its fall, stood on the ground, shedding a pale light around it.

" By Omar, let me speak ! " said the man, almost before he was up, and just as if nothing particular had occurred. " Between Mussulmans these matters can always be arranged. Because you are a follower of Omar and I of his Highness Ali does not mean . . ."

At this point his hand brushed against mine. He

turned round and, quick as lightning, picked up the lantern, holding it towards me. The light fell on the face of Bibi Mâh, revealed among the displaced folds of silk, and then upon mine.

"Ah! ah!" the fellow chuckled. Then, turning towards Mansur, "Now, my fine friend, my beloved soul, it is my turn to make conditions! The carcase that reeks the foulest is not *my* carcase! What's your game, eh, dog, and son of a dog—son of the dog Omar?" And with one bound he sprang up the steps and disappeared from sight.

"Thy death!" screamed Mansur, rushing after him. And before I could breathe I heard a cry two paces off, and the sound of a falling body, then the voice of Mansur:

"Quick, Sidi, quick! We must fly!"

And with Bibi Mâh in my arms, I started off after him at a run.

But fresh trouble greeted us, this time in the shape of some dogs, who pursued us, and as I stopped, breathless, for a moment, to recover, with Mansur's assistance, one of these wretched animals set upon Bibi Mâh and bit her. A cry of anguish rose on the air; the pain of the bite had restored her to consciousness. *A quelque chose malheur est bon!* (Misfortune has its uses!)

My joy was so great that it seemed to lend me a supernatural strength to overcome every obstacle. We drove off the dogs with some difficulty and ran on.

A few minutes later and we were under the welcome shelter of Mansur's roof.

CHAPTER IV

DANGER

BIBI MÂH lay stretched on the thin mattress which served Nur Jehan for bed. She had asked for something to drink. I raised her head gently, and while she swallowed eagerly from the earthen bowl which the Abyssinian woman brought her, her great eyes sought mine with an indefinable expression, as of a beaten gazelle.

Her thirst quenched, she did not speak, but drew her *chadur* across her face.

"Mâh! *janem!*—my Soul!" I exclaimed, "are you better?"

She did not reply. I laid her head softly back upon the pillows and lifted the *chadur;* her eyes were closed, her bosom, half revealed, heaved with the breath that came and went in little panting gasps. The bandage had slipped somewhat, but so slightly that it seemed better not to disturb her by altering it. Nur Jehan would disrobe her presently, and at nightfall, or earlier if the weather proved kindly inclement enough to conceal my movements, I should return and put on a fresh dressing. For the moment there seemed nothing to be done but to leave her, and the sooner the better, if I wished to reach home before the servants were about.

Mansur was giving instructions to his wife in guarded accents, swearing her to secrecy as to the Khanum's presence, and exhorting her to look after her like a sister.

He would explain the mystery later, he assured her, but for the moment she must be content to follow his instructions blindly. Above all, she must neither leave the house herself nor admit anyone into it upon any pretext whatever; he would return himself some time during the morning with provisions and medical necessaries.

His short married life had already taught him much as to the doglike fidelity of this woman's nature, and he had become singularly attached to her in these few months of their union. He knew that she was to be trusted, and that, whatever happened, she would never betray her Sunnite lord into the hands of any Shiite.

But as we turned to go, Nur Jehan suddenly detained us with a question. She was to be left alone with the Khanum: what if the Persians came for her meanwhile?

And I realised suddenly that she was right: the Persians would come for her. How could I ever have been such a fool as to imagine that Mansur's house would be a safe asylum? Nothing can be kept secret in Teheran, and without a doubt Baghir Khan would institute a search, not only in my own house, but in those of my servants and dependents—and for these there would be no privilege of diplomatic immunity.

At this moment we were startled by a knocking upon the outer door of the room, leading into the courtyard.

"Who's there?" called out Mansur, advancing, dagger in hand.

There was no reply.

"Who is there?" he repeated, and after an interval of silence, he began cautiously to open the door—to admit . . . Ahu the Gazelle, and with her the inspiration for another plan of escape.

"The house next door—" I asked, "is it still uninhabited?"

"Yes, Sidi!"

"Good! Let us be off now—quick. And you, good Nur Jehan, make yourself easy—it will be all right."

CHAPTER V

ANXIETY

WHEN at length I once more entered my own room, day seemed scarcely to be dawning, although it was close upon seven o'clock. Without it was still snowing, and within nothing stirred as yet. Fate was certainly on our side, and I could face all future difficulties with courage and hope.

Before returning to bed I examined the spot where my beloved victim had fallen—a little blood still showed on the carpet. Oh, that blood! Magical elixir that had transformed all in a moment my whole attitude towards Bibi Mâh. Until the flowing of that warm red stream my feelings had been nebulous, dormant, formless larvæ in the darkness of my heart. But these crimson drops had burst the chrysalis and released into the sunshine the full-fledged Golden Butterfly—of Love.

I love her! I love her! I love her!

How gladly I would have died for her! I, who was forced to remain tied down to inactivity, whilst every moment was fraught for her with fresh danger!

Why had I not been born a Mussulman? And why should religion be for ever erecting impassable barriers between race and race? This creed of Islam would seem as narrowly inimical as the rest to the doctrine of Universal Brotherhood.

But in this Islamic country there was nothing for it but to resign myself to the Will of Allah—and wait!

The time dragged on, slowly, interminably. Until eight o'clock I must remain in bed, as usual, after which another hour must go upon my customary leisurely toilette, as if life were turning in its ordinary placid course, and there were no twofold Shadow of Death above the head of my belovéd.

I pictured to myself the fury of Baghir Khan on learning of her flight.

But, as a matter of fact, he would scarcely hear of it so early. When the return of day brought with it to the harem the discovery of Bibi Mâh's absence, all sorts of conjectures would probably suggest themselves as possible before the truth were even suspected—that which she had done was so startling, so utterly unheard-of for a Mohammedan woman! As she is without relations in Teheran, the first idea would be that she had gone to the house of Zarin Taj, and before enquiries could be made there, the morning would be well advanced. Then—they would hesitate before braving the wrath of Baghir Khan with the news. His disgrace, and the bastinado to which the Shah condemned him last week, would most certainly have affected his temper. It was probable, therefore, that the danger would not become imminent until towards evening, or, possibly, even not until next morning.

A quarter past seven! Still no stir.

Half-past seven! Ah! the sound of a door slamming—muffled footsteps in the courtyard—a noise of sneezing—the murmur of distant conversation; and presently Mansur came into my room, his faint salaam sticking in his throat.

I thanked him warmly and pressed his hand. He was so overcome by this unaccustomed gesture that he raised my hand to his forehead, and I felt beneath it steal two tears.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE WAKE OF THE GAZELLE

AT half-past nine I was in Yvonne's boudoir, and her silvery accents came to me through the curtains. "What! can it really be you at such an early hour? You must have some news! Wait just two minutes and I will be with you!"

When I had told her everything, she remained silent for some moments, looking fixedly before her. Then, without change of attitude, she said: "The discovery the other day on the terrace will provide an obvious clue. So the . . . 'lady' must be taken elsewhere as soon as possible—and, my dear man, there is only one place in which she can—*perhaps*—be in safety; let her come here—through the track of the Gazelle!"

"My selfishness had already put that idea into my mind," I replied, "but I should not have liked to make the suggestion. Even now—I feel that I ought to refuse your generous offer, because, if, by any chance, she were discovered here——"

"Nothing could come of it!" she interrupted quickly. "No harm to me, I mean. I am a woman—she came to me for protection—what more natural?"

"But——"

"Don't stop to argue. Go and tell Mansur what we have settled. He knows the way. His wife will help him to carry her. Thank Heaven—and the *Mir Ab*—it is not the day for bringing the water into the district,

and so the channels are dry. Then come back here, and whilst I get my assistants and servants out of the way into the shop, on some pretext or other, you can watch in the garden—at the Gate of the Gazelle ! "

. . . . .

Midnight.

Bibi Mâh is safe, safe in the *haram* room, where are kept under lock and key Yvonne's most gorgeous silks and most valuable stock-in-trade. Her wound is not serious, and she has only a slight touch of fever, enough to tinge with carmine her usually colourless cheeks.

Maktûb that she should be mine !

CHAPTER VII

SAFE!

THE immediate danger is past. In the first place, my own house has evidently been subjected to a most minute inspection, for there is not a spot which does not appear to have been examined, down to my very linen cupboard, the lock of which, indeed, has been forced by some mysterious hand. Then Mansur's place has been visited also—in another manner. Yesterday evening a man came and knocked at his door, pretending to be a poor devil in search of *bast* (refuge), and he was scarcely inside when a party of *farraches* arrived, and demanded entrance in the name of the Shah, a piece of trickery. Under pretext of searching for the *basti*, they ransacked both house and courtyard from end to end, bullied Nur Jehan, and tore off the veil which she had hastily thrown over her at their entrance.

Poor Baghir Khan, Magnificence-of-the-Royal-Intimacy, behold you now, disgraced, bastinadoed, and, to crown all, outwitted by an Infidel! I credit you with the wisdom to hide from your enemies—innumerable since the Asylum of the Universe has driven you from beneath his shadow—this third *avatar* which, were it to become known, would certainly put an end for ever to all hope of a return to favour!

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW CAGE

THE wounded bird has once more changed her cage. Mansur's humble roof again shelters my captive—yes, my captive!

I would that I might have conquered her at the scimitar's point; that I might have carried her off, swung to the crupper of my charger, as the custom still is with certain nomad tribes. Such a rape would have made her seem more truly mine than does this inglorious conquest by "accident."

Her present resting-place is a poor room, long and narrow, between its baked-mud walls, with no other furniture than a bed and some wooden chests, massive and iron-clamped; her couch the usual one of every Persian, just a mattress laid upon the felt which covers the floor of beaten earth, and upon it a quilted bed-spread, to which is sewn one of the sheets, and several round pillows of different dimensions, to support the head and keep it from slipping. The ceiling, which is also the roof of the house, is formed of beams of young poplar trunks, placed at intervals of a foot apart, overlaid with branches which are covered on the outside with a coating of mud. There is no fireplace; in its stead is a *kursi*, a wide, low table, covered with a cloth of shot brown and old gold, beneath which is a copper brazier containing live charcoal. This "fire" gives forth no heat into the room, and in order to keep

warm one must get right underneath the cloth. It covers in this way a portion of Bibi Mâh's bed. On the *takhtchas* are some bowls and other utensils of earthenware, together with a glass paraffin lamp of Russian manufacture, which completes the furniture. An extinguished *kalyan* stands in one corner.

Each night, at an hour when the streets are deserted, and with infinite precautions against the possibility of being seen, I go thither to find my belovéd. Her wound is healing, but she herself does not seem to make much progress towards recovery; she remains taciturn and drowsy, with constant return of fever. As a wounded bird, hiding in some obscure hole, she buries herself in the bedclothes and replies only by monosyllables to the attentive questionings of good Nur Jehan.

Hitherto I have scarcely been more fortunate. Whilst I am dressing her wound she groans, and I read a great fear in her eyes; then the heavy lids close once more, and her head sinks back on her shoulder. Yet she is not so ill as to be unable to speak. Is it that she is angry with me as the cause of her present suffering? Or does her religion render unbearable to her the touch of an "unclean" Infidel?

A PERSIAN QUACK

(FROM A NATIVE PRINT)

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CHAPTER IX

EDEN AND THE ETERNAL EVE

I SPENT last night, as each preceding one, watching beside Bibi Mâh. The weather had improved during the day, and the temperature was so much higher that the *kursi* had been pushed aside to the other end of the room.

She had greeted my entrance with a faint smile, which gladdened me, but she had no answer for me when I spoke to her. Her eyes searched mine, no longer with the pathetic charm of the beaten gazelle, but with a fixed, impenetrable gaze, whose meaning I could not fathom. It was as if between us rose, invisible, the wall of the harem.

A soft light fell upon the amber oval of her cheek, with its spot of vivid scarlet, over which the long lashes traced a delicate shadow, and at the corner of her mouth, small and red as some ripe fruit, a dimple showed itself. I watched her with a sense of fascination, of strange emotion, my whole being passionately vibrant.

Her hair fell over the yellow gold of the cushions beneath her head in a myriad of strands, sweeping away on either side of her pale forehead like a raven's wings. Her delicate arched brows met above her nose, linked, as it were, by a tattooed star.

She pushed aside the coverlid with a quick gesture, and her bosom lay open to my view, with its exquisite lines, the throat rounded as an ivory column, whose

swelling base gently lifted the transparent folds of its *pirhan* of shivered gauze. A subtle perfume of rose and ambergris accentuated the elusive sensuality, by whose voluptuousness I was bemused.

Bibi Mâh's little hand lay white upon the flowers of the quilt; upon her shell-like finger-nails were henna-stained crescents. I kissed the shining crescents. I kissed the little hand of Bibi Mâh.

She did not move. Her cheek rested where it had fallen against her shoulder, but her quickened breathing showed in the rising and falling of the gauze, the flash of its silver stars upon her breast. Her lips unclosed, moistly red as a pomegranate in the sun; and slowly, softly, gently, her eyelids lifted, hesitating, to fall again at once with a quiver of silky lashes.

Unconsciously I had bent lower, and my face was now quite close to hers, so close, indeed, that the end of my moustache brushed her cheek. She shivered, her head shifted, and her great dark eyes gazed into my own. This time their expression was different. I knew that glance, already caught sight of upon the terrace, that glance which had drawn my soul away; but it was glowing now with a strange new fire, a sparkle and a splendour hitherto unknown, whose irresistible magic opened before me a new Eden.

My brain swam, my ears sang with a sound of voluptuous music, and my lips grew faint at the burning touch of the lips of Bibi Mâh!

CHAPTER X

THE HAREM WALL

WHEN shall I have thrown down for ever that harem wall raised by Mahomet between my belovéd and myself?

Every night I think that it has fallen, only to find it on the morrow bristling between us more menacingly than before.

Does Bibi Mâh love me, or does she not? She does so, no doubt, in those moments of *abandon* when, carried away by passion, she forgets that I am an Infidel; but afterwards, when reason reasserts itself, when the iron band of Islam once more contracts around her pretty head, does she still love me then?

At times she hopes to convert me, and I know that she prays to Her Highness Fatima the Pure to intercede with the Lord of Time to enlighten my understanding. In her flight from the house of Baghir Khan she did not forget to bring with her her Koran and some talismans which she had secretly purchased from the dervishes, and to please her I wear several of them disposed about my person: one, hung round my neck by a chain of gold, is a minute tube containing a morsel of parchment upon which is inscribed the Mussulman profession of faith; others, enclosed in little leather sachets, are fastened by straps around my arms. When she grows importunate in the matter of religion it becomes my turn to grow dumb, and to retire behind the impalpable wall of my harem of philosophy.

This shadow of Islam is the only cloud in our sky, and if only it would not fall across the sunshine of our love, I should welcome it as a bit of local colour, and also on account of the sympathy I have always felt towards Mussulmans. But at times it grows so dark, this shadow of Islam !

. . . . .

Bibi Mâh knows several chapters of the Koran by heart, and what is more, she understands their meaning, not that she understands Arabic, but they have been translated and explained to her.

There is one chapter which she repeats constantly, and the characters of which she has traced in green silk embroidery upon a strip of buff linen. They are the verses of the Evidence which, according to her, must sooner or later lead to my conversion, especially if I will but cover my head with them when sleeping. Mohammedans attach a special importance to these lines, for the doctors of Islam have said : " The virtuous Mohammedan who reads the chapter of the Evidence shall be placed at the Resurrection among the most excellent creations of the Hands of the Eternal."

It runs as follows :—

" In the Name of the Most Merciful God.

" The unbelievers among those to whom the scriptures were given, and among the idolaters, did not stagger until the clear evidence had come unto them : an apostle from God rehearsing unto them pure books of revelations ; wherein are contained right discourses. Neither were they unto whom the scriptures were given divided among themselves, until after the clear evidence had come unto them.

" And they were commanded no other in the scriptures than to worship God, exhibiting unto him the pure

religion, and being orthodox; and to be constant at prayer, and to give alms: and this is the right religion.

"Verily those who believe not, among those who have received the scriptures, and among the idolaters, shall be cast into the fire of hell, to remain there for ever. These are the worst of creatures. But they who believe and do good works, these are the best of creatures: their reward with their Lord shall be gardens of perpetual abode, through which rivers flow; they shall remain therein for ever. God will be well pleased in them, and they shall be well pleased in him. This is prepared for him who shall fear his Lord."

A PERSIAN BARBER—SPREADING REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

FROM THE "MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN"

CHAPTER XI

THE ATTEMPT ON THE SHAH'S LIFE

March.

THE nervous strain of my double life—a diplomat by day, a lover half the night—complicated by a horrible cold on the chest, the result of the "Dreadful Night," reduced me at last to my bed, and here I have been, for more than a week, a prisoner in my room. For the first few days the doctor would not hear of my seeing anyone, but the day before yesterday, as my temperature was again normal, Mansur was allowed to admit Vecquincourt, Isfandiar, and the Mirza for a few minutes; and yesterday and to-day I have felt so well that, but for the express orders of the doctor, I should have been up. I have spent a very pleasant day, in spite of this restriction, with an almost continuous succession of visitors to my bedside. Indeed, my illness has brought me so much friendly sympathy, and above all such sweet little messages from Bibi Mâh, Yvonne, and Mme Chabret, that I feel quite a liking for the rôle of invalid!

Bibi Mâh's letters are most quaintly picturesque. Written upon a lustred paper resembling parchment, cut by the writer herself from one large sheet, the exact size of the intended missive, each bears at the head of its single page, in a great white space, a little mysterious sign, "*Hu*" ("Him")—Allah. Then follow several lines of compliment and greeting, an invocation to Her Highness Fatima the Pure, to intercede with the Most Merciful for

my speedy recovery, and regrets at not seeing me—" Since you no longer bring your honours to the presence of your humble little friend, the sun's rays no longer shine for her."

Who is it says, " Out of sight, out of mind " ?

Bibi Mâh has never been more lovable, and never have I loved her more.

I do not feel so much not seeing her as not being able to speak of her. Of course Mansur brings me news of her, and equally of course I question him as to her well-being ; but I cannot *speak of her*, in the true sense of the word, to him, confidant rather than servant though he be. In this case his real thoughts are, of necessity, hidden from me, and I cannot but feel that his Mussulman conscience must disapprove of my invasion of a domain which is in his eyes *haram*—sacred.

Ah ! to *speak* of her—passionately, infinitely—to soothe my love with the delicious sound of words which sing of her grace, her beauty, her charm ; to listen to the vibration of those dear syllables—" Bibi Mâh " ! For the lover half the joy of loving lies in speaking of the Belovéd. I envy those poets who have filled the world with the name of their *inamorate*, and I pity from my heart the Mussulman for whom his wife is nameless to all outside, save in some periphrase, as " The mother of such an one."

At the outset of my intrigue on the terrace, Yvonne was always ready to talk to me about "the little Lady-with-the-Velvet-Eyes," as she called her, poetically, but since that time when she so good-naturedly hid Bibi Mâh for me, she has avoided mentioning her. As for Vecquincourt, it is wiser to keep him in ignorance of this episode, and the same with the Mirza, and above all with Isfandiar. But is Isfandiar so entirely unconscious of it, I wonder ? Has Turkan Khatun been able to conceal from her

daughter her suspicions as to the disappearance of Bibi Mâh, her discovery of our intercourse up there on the terrace? Shall I ever know?

In default of these conversations, these "monologues *à deux*" for which my heart is thus sighing, I have this afternoon been treated to a disquisition by Mirza Jafar upon the political events of the past week.

The chief excitement seems to have been the attempt to assassinate the Shah, of which the Reactionaries accuse the Constitutionalists, whilst these, in their turn, assert proof to the contrary, and declare that it is the *Anjuman* of Gulistan which has organised this transparent plot ("*cousu de fil blanc*"), to throw discredit upon the Liberal Party. This, of course, is the Mirza's own opinion, which he supports by quotations from *The Powerful Help* and other newspapers of weight.

He had taken up a position on the floor at the foot of my bed, feeling more at his ease thus than seated, Western fashion, on a chair, and had surrounded himself with the various papers from which he proposed to read to me.

Amongst the most noticeable articles, he drew my attention particularly to one, a most biting specimen of irony, in that most literary and most ably edited of all the Persian Press, *The Trumpet of Israfil*, whose bitter satires have already on several occasions drawn down upon the editors the thunders of Mohammed Ali.

The frontispiece of this paper is quite a contents-bill in itself, representing the Angel Israfil, trumpet in hand, hovering above a sleeping multitude. Some few wakeful units are striving to rouse their comrades from their lethargy, pointing to the Angel of the Resurrection ready to lead them on to a new life, and to a scroll, suspended apparently in space, on which is inscribed the motto of the French Revolution—"*Liberté, Egalité,*

Fraternité," and, beneath this *surate* of a new Koran, the 103rd verse of the XXIII *surate* of the Book of Mahomet—"When the trumpet shall sound, O then there will no longer be any ties of kinship between them!" That is, doubtless, between the Liberals and the Reactionaries.

"You will remember," said the Mirza to me, "the first number of this paper that appeared last year, you had so much difficulty in understanding it. You have made great progress since then, haven't you?"

"Yes, I remember it," I replied, "and I haven't forgotten, either, the effect it produced upon the public."

"I kept a copy of it at the time, and I have brought it with me this afternoon for you to read over again and judge of your progress for yourself. You see all these words underlined? They are those the sense of which I had to explain to you. Of course, the style of this particular paper is more difficult for you to follow than that of some, because its editors, unlike most, make it a rule to employ a purely Persian vocabulary, avoiding as far as possible the use of Arabic. I think the idea splendid myself, and I only hope that before long we shall see all true patriots following their example."

He handed me the paper, and I read as follows:—

"O Majesty, O crownéd Father, hast thou ever read the history of Julius Cæsar of Rome? Dost thou remember the story of the King of England? Dost thou recall the adventures of Louis XVI? Hast thou in mind the assassination of thy grandfather, the crown-bearer? Canst thou believe in all seriousness that every one of these historical personages was guilty, and deserving of the doom that overtook him? I swear by the Eternal Unity, I swear by Justice that these unfortunates, whose melancholy fate draws tears from the eyes that read their history, were personally most pure, like thyself, and, like thyself, without fault. That of which the nation

accused them, to take and behead them or hack them to death with swords of vengeance, was not their personal fault. How came it, then, that their people allowed themselves to be carried into such extremes of action, into such complete oblivion of all gratitude?

"If thou wilt permit it, with a heart overflowing with affection, a soul impregnated with the love of God, from the testimony of the chronicles of this world I will expose the reason before thy sacred feet, and I pray that thou on thy part as a benevolent father wilt hearken unto my words. . . ."

"M. le Comte de Vecquincourt!" announced Mansur, bowing low as my friend passed him.

"Ah! I'm glad to see you looking so much better, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Vecquincourt, pressing my hand warmly. "In fact, no one could be more delighted, unless, indeed, it were Mme Basqueville! She came as far as your door with me, and sent you all sorts of nice messages, and this bunch of violets taken from her waist. Though you haven't been instrumental in saving *her* life, so far as I know, as you did mine, she has been following the course of your malady with an anxiety that positively puts mine to the blush. . . . Hullo! Mirza Jafar! *Khuda hafiz! ahvali shuma cha taur ast?*"

"Your Excellency's attentions are overwhelming!" replied the Mirza. "May your shadow never grow less!"

When Vecquincourt had seated himself, the Mirza, having resumed his position on the carpet, bowed and saluted him afresh, after the Persian manner, then, seeing that my colleague was busy delivering himself of the various messages entrusted to him for me by Yvonne and the Chabrets, giving me at the same time all their news, he set to work to dispense the tea which Mansur had just brought in.

"Another cup, Your Excellency?"

"No, thanks, Mirza! But whatever is that mass of literature all round you? Some interesting piece of news, eh? I'm afraid I've interrupted you."

"Mirza Jafar was just going to read me the article in *The Trumpet of Israfil* on the attempt against the Shah; if you don't already know it, perhaps you might like to hear it, too?"

"Yes, indeed, though it will be a severe test for my Persian, I'm afraid. Still—if the Mirza will be good enough to read it very slowly, I may be able to gather the sense of it."

Thus encouraged, the Mirza drew his hand down over his beard and began as follows:—

"'On Wednesday, the 25th Muharram, 1326 (February 28th, 1908), three hours before sunset, His Imperial Majesty, repairing to Fahr-Abad, entered the avenue behind the Barbar Takkia, his own carriage and the automobile which preceded him being surrounded by guards of horsemen, police, and constables, ranged on either side of the road . . .'"

"Amir Bahadur Jang and the Russian Shapshal rode by either door of the carriage," interrupted Vecquincourt, "and the Shah's carriage was preceded not only by an automobile driven by one of our subjects, the chauffeur Varnet, but by another carriage as well, drawn by six horses."

The Mirza went on: "'. . . constables ranged on either side of the road, when, all of a sudden, a bomb exploded. The back of the carriage was driven in and a certain number of persons were killed and wounded. Very fortunately—and this is very lucky for the nation—His Majesty's vehicle was about a hundred paces behind the automobile, and thanks to this circumstance, the Shah was preserved from all harm, to the intense joy and delight of the whole population.

" 'Another bomb exploded in the next street to the Barbar Takkia. . . . ' "

My attention wandered from the reading. My thoughts stole from violet to violet, from blossom to blossom; the bubbling of the water boiling in the *samovar* soothed me with its monotonous rhythm. My eyes closed, the better to behold those images so dear to my heart. . . . But here the voice of the Mirza rose, dispelling my visions, and forcing my attention back to his reading.

" 'The popular relief at the Shah's safety spread through the town, and during the whole night long the bazars and the caravanseries were illuminated; certain people, certain *Anjumans*, indeed, illuminated their doorways for three nights.

" 'All these marks of a joy springing from the love of the nation for their King were spontaneous, and we have in this the best proof of the affection which unites Shah and people.

" 'And the response of His Majesty to the felicitations received from all parts amply testified to his imperial good-will towards his subjects. Verily, there can be no greater happiness for Persia than this proof of a mutual relation of true and healthy confidence. What intrigue on the part of the evilly-disposed could make a breach in the columns of this union, this mutual understanding?' "

" I'm sorry to have to interrupt you again, Mirza!" said Vecquincourt in his broken Persian, fluent enough, but marked by a strong Parisian accent, " but your paper, through its penchant for irony at the expense of Mohammed Ali Shah, omits certain relevant and important details which would, I am sure, interest M. Valmont. The subtilty displayed by your compatriots with regard to everything concerning public manifestations of loyalty, either to their sovereign or to their religion, prevents them from having any erroneous impression as to their real

meaning. So it is that the books of the Babis can pass for orthodox writings for the uninitiated reader. In the same way, the cheers which the crowd sent up for the Shah after the attempt upon his life have been interpreted by all Persians, who really know anything about it, as the expression rather of their disappointment that the bombs did not do for him."

Mirza assented, by an inclination of the head and a smile.

"But let us come back to facts," went on Vecquincourt, turning to me. "When the second bomb exploded between the motor and the first carriage, to the accompaniment of shots fired from the neighbouring terraces, Amir Bahadur and Shapshal flung themselves into the fray, pistol in hand, forgetting, doubtless, that they were there to shield His Majesty with their persons. Bahadur discharged six cartridges in the direction of the terraces, without result, whilst Shapshal brandished his weapon without realising, as he afterwards declared, that he was not firing it at all. About a dozen men and two of the horses of the first carriage were rolling on the ground, knocked down by the explosion of the bomb and the random firing of the escort.

"As the two favourite bodyguards returned to their post of honour they saw the Shah leave the carriage and make for the doorway of the nearest house. They joined him there, but as the door would not yield to their pressure and there happened to be another one standing open on the opposite side of the way, they got the Shah over to that. It was the house of his head coachman. There he asked for a drink, and a bowl of water was instantly presented to him. He was raising it to his lips, when Bahadur, staying the august arm, suggested that the liquid might possibly have been poisoned, and sent for the *Sakka-Bashi*, the head water-carrier, who, with the Pipe-bearer, always forms part of the royal suite.

" The tumult having abated in the meantime, Mohammed Ali started to return to his carriage, but scarcely had he got outside the door when several shots blazed forth, and a bullet came flying by, to flatten itself in the wall a couple of paces from where he stood. Full of rage, he seized the rifle of one of the guard, and squared his shoulders, ready to knock down his supposed assailant, but Bahadur and Shapshal gave him no time for this, pushing him unceremoniously back into the doorway of the house which he had just left. Within the shelter of its walls, they say, His Majesty, giving full vent to his indignation, assaulted the Governor of Teheran, who had joined him, with vigorous blows on the head with a walking-stick, and ordered the Chief of Police to be blown from a gun, and the whole quarter to be destroyed and its inhabitants killed. Fortunately, the imperial wrath passed away and these orders were rescinded. Fact, all this, eh, Mirza ? "

" The truth of truths ! " replied Jafar, with a bow. *The Trumpet of Israfil* slipped from his knees on to the floor. He picked it up, and Vecquincourt begged him to continue, although his imperfect knowledge of Persian only allowed of his following the general drift of the reading. " It will be as good as a lesson for me ! " he said. Then, taking out his cigarette case with a " You don't mind, do you ? " to me, he handed it to Jafar.

After two or three puffs the Mirza resumed his reading.

" ' The popular relief at the safety of the Shah ' . . . I have read that ! . . . Ah ! here we are: ' But the generous Persian nation has been deeply moved at the realisation, amid these terrible occurrences, of what took place at the very moment of the explosion ; so deeply affected, indeed, as to be inconsolable.

" ' At the moment of the explosion all the horsemen of the guard, who boasted of being reckoned amongst the

number of His Majesty's defenders, all these men of whose pretended loyalty and fictitious devotion Pasha Khan, Amir Bahadur Jang made so much boast, all, rear and vanguard alike, discharged their rifles and then flung themselves madly into the crowd.

" 'They killed some of the passers-by, and looted a couple of horses from Musaddak-us-Saltana, and another couple that they unharnessed from a tram; falling in with an Armenian, Simon Agha, on their way, they dragged him out of his carriage in the Avenue Jalil-Abad, stole his watch, and emptied his pockets. They pillaged a shop in Hassan-Abad, and killed a man.

" 'The soldiers of the Silakhur regiment, the guard of the Gulistan Palace, abandoned their post to pillage the town. And all this at the moment when, for the space of half an hour, the Shah was defending himself single-handed in the house of Mujallal-ul-Mulk, the chief of the coachmen. . . .' "

" Ahem ! " coughed Vecquincourt.

" 'Ah ! popular feeling was not mistaken !' " went on the Mirza. " 'Yes! it is the same Bahadur Jang who pretended that he could capture Europe with the horsemen of the guard; this same individual who called all the Imams and martyrs to witness to the absolute devotion of all the cavalry of the Shah. Doubtless, in times of peace, the same pretensions could be made by any man, and anyone might brag even more loudly than Amir Bahadur Jang; but in circumstances like the present deeds reveal the truth of men's sentiments. Yes, we may well say that the people did well to dislike Bahadur !

" 'M. Varnet, the Shah's chauffeur, gave the following account of what took place: " I brought the car round to the door of the *anderûn:* the curtains inside were drawn. I supposed that the Shah would enter the car, but I saw that the cavalry and the guards were sur-

rounding it, and they gave me orders to proceed. I asked: 'If His Majesty is not coming in the car, why draw the curtains?' 'His Majesty is not coming in the car,' was the reply. An unpleasant idea occurred to me. 'If you fear some danger,' I said, 'why should you expose me to it?' But whether I would or no, I had to start, and I got as far as the thoroughfare of the Barbars. There I saw someone fling something wrapped in a check handkerchief against the car. I put on speed, but there was a sudden explosion, so violent that the shock on the air caused me to lose my balance. I turned round after a few seconds, but I could see no one, except a passer-by, in whose face a horseman of the guard had discharged his gun . . .'"

"That seems the popular method of administering justice here!" said Vecquincourt. "Every crime must have its punishment, and in default of the real culprit the rule seems to be—seize the first who comes. I was told the other day that a crime having been committed in the neighbourhood of Ispahan, the Governor of that town sent out two of his *farrashes* with orders to bring in the criminals, alive or dead. Their search having been in vain, the *farrashes* were returning, much disgusted at their lack of success, and not less uneasy as to the reception they might expect from the autocratic Governor on their appearance empty-handed, when they saw, journeying in front of them on the deserted road, a poor villager. The same idea struck both these wretches at once, and without exchanging so much as a word, they drew their swords and galloped up to the unconscious traveller, whose head rolled in the dust under the sword-stroke of the foremost. The head was exhibited at Ispahan as that of the culprit, and the *farrashes* were liberally rewarded.

"But do go on, Mirza. You'd got to . . .?"

"'. . . a passer-by in whose face one of the horsemen

of the guard had discharged his rifle,' " said Jafar, and he continued: " 'His Majesty hastily left his carriage, and essayed to enter the house of Mirza Husayn Khan, the oculist, but as the door was closed, he went instead to a house close by, that of Moujallal-ul-Mulk. When the faithful guards of His Majesty found that the Shah was safe, they reluctantly retired from their occupation of brigandage and returned to their master. But as the carriage with the six horses could not easily be turned round in the narrow street, His Majesty returned on foot to the Gulistan, escorted by thirty artillerymen of the guard.

" 'The next morning, two hours after sunrise, two gardeners who were sweeping up manure in the garden of the Vizier Makhsus were killed by a bomb concealed in the dust, which exploded at their feet. A second bomb was also found there and taken to the police.

" 'Police, Governors, everyone, in fact, set to work to find out the authors of these crimes; but without result. However, in an uninhabited house, close to the Barbar Takkia, they discovered six capsules of dynamite, two bombs, and a false beard. Sayyid Ghulam Riza Khan, a goldsmith of Marand in Azarbayjan, asserts that he is acquainted with the owners of the house, and that they are in friendly relations with Shapshal Khan. As for the copper balls which served for the bombs, they were ordered, several months ago, by Shaïdayoff, an Azarbayjan charlatan, now in prison, from a founder in the Street of the Gas, for use as the roses of watering-cans. . . ."

" What do you infer from that ? " cried Isfandiar, who had just come in, preceded by Mansur.

Vecquincourt caught the ball on the rebound, and replied as he shook hands, " Why, one mustn't accuse the Palace of having a hand in all this, just because M. Shapshal was on friendly terms with the proprietors of

the house in which the bombs and the false beard were found."

"But," returned Isfandiar, "only the Palace were aware that the Shah was going out that day and that he intended taking that particular route. As he has not been out since October the 12th, how could the Revolutionists have managed to be ready just at the right moment and at the right place? The Shah had not given out beforehand his intention of going to Fahr-Abad on the 25th Muharram, three hours before sunset! It's a little too bad to put everything on to the *Anjumans* in this way."

"The name of Zill-us-Sultan has been mentioned also," said Vecquincourt. "The terraces of his *anderûn* look on to the scene of the attack, and it is an open secret that he wants to rid the throne of the brutal autocracy of his nephew, to establish in its place his own paternal autocracy."

And so the discussion went on, without my taking any part in it, though I listened with interest, in spite of a growing weariness.

When Vecquincourt had departed, Isfandiar said to me:

"Oh—I've no mind for politics to-day; it's all taken up with rejoicing at the departure of Turkan Khatun!"

"What?" I asked, trying not to appear too much interested.

"Yes, she's gone off to the shrine of Mashad with Baghir Khan. Here, you know, when any great personage is in disgrace, he sets out on a pilgrimage, partly because this meritorious act causes his fault to be forgotten, and partly as a precautionary measure . . . to get out of reach of the *fallak* of the bastinado!"

CHAPTER XII

CHEZ BIBI MÂH

MY hand trembled as I raised the knocker on the door, and when Nur Jehan, answering the summons, asked, "Who is there?" my reply also trembled upon my lips.

Once more I was about to see her! My impatience had been so great that I had not been able to wait for nightfall, and had cast all thoughts of prudence to the winds.

It was a perfect afternoon in March, still and sunny. As I entered the courtyard, I could see Mâh lying on her couch, which had been drawn into the open windows of her room. Ahu, the gazelle, had planted her feet on the window-ledge, and was reaching out her head to be stroked. On her red coat the slender hand of the invalid showed up white as a flower. I took it and kissed it fervently.

Startled at the touch of my lips, Bibi Mâh gave a little shriek, and instinctively drew her *chadur namez* across her face with her other hand. But at the sight of me she quickly recovered her composure, and exclaimed joyfully, "Your footsteps are upon my eyes—you are welcome!"

We held each other's hands and looked at one another for a moment in silence. Then I kissed her forehead, right on the little blue star. She received my caress passively, closing her eyes and making no attempt to return it, but she clasped my hands more strenuously.

"You will come up here and sit beside me," she said. "*Bali?*—Yes?"

There were but four small steps between the courtyard and the room where she was lying.

And when I was seated cross-legged by the head of her bed she cried, "*Al-hamdullah!* your nose has grown fat again. So you're quite well?"

"*Al-hamdullah!* What about your own pretty little nose, *Janam?* Is that also growing fat? How goes the wound?"

"It is much better, by the grace of Allah."

"Why so serious, little soul?"

"I was afraid—I feared—I should never see you again when Nur Jehan told me you were so ill! Your eyes still shine somewhat—with the fever, *Bali?*"

"They shine with delight at their reflection in thine own—that is all!"

The sun shone down upon us with his first spring rays. It was all so lovely, and we felt so peaceful, so happy, that words seemed somehow unnecessary. Ahu had subsided upon the warm flags beneath the window. In the centre of the court the inevitable tank reflected the sky, the fish floating on the surface of the water so close together and so still that they seemed but a morsel of cloth of gold. Above a butterfly, out before his time, fluttered by in search of some blossom whereon to settle.

"*Dalam—dalam pur ast!*" murmured Mâh ("My heart—my heart is full!").

Mansur had had one of the rooms of his humble dwelling decorated under my auspices. It was a room at the end of the court which otherwise he would not have used, on account of its size and its condition of disrepair. In the more prosperous days of the building it had been the principal apartment—the *talar*. An uninterrupted series of windows stretched along the whole

A PERSIAN HOUSE, SHOWING COURTYARD WITH FOUNTAIN, TALAR AND BED

(NATIVE PRINT)

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of one end, the tiny panes of glass, framed in narrow woodwork, replacing the scraps of oiled paper which alone did duty in this capacity formerly in habitations of the humbler sort. The walls and ceiling had been newly whitewashed, a chimney constructed, and upon the *takhtchas* stood rows of candelabra, with crystal hangings —the luxury of a Persian drawing-room. For the carpet, it was a good specimen of Karadagh manufacture, a dark blue ground, upon which were sprinkled white blossoms with pink calices, called by the dealers " henna flowers," hieratic in design and arranged in threes on either side of a green stem, and, perching upon them, peacocks, so quaintly drawn as to be guessed at rather than actually seen. In one corner a mattress, draped with a Cashmir shawl, indicated the place of honour, the top of the room.

Mansur had certainly done things in style, and I had reason to feel proud of his taste. He had, however, yielded to the temptation to purchase some pictures—two chromo-lithographs of German origin—representing a luxuriant beauty in extreme *décolleté*. The same figure precisely appeared in both pictures, in accordance with the Persian idea which demands that all details of decoration shall be in *juft*—in pairs.

Such was the boudoir of Bibi Mâh, which served at the same time as her dining-room, not to mention her bedroom, a most ordinary combination in Persia, the more so, naturally, in the case of an invalid.

The sun having disappeared behind the roof, I closed the windows and then, assisted by Nur Jehan, who had come in to relight the fire, I drew Bibi Mâh's couch up the room, to the side of the Cashmir shawl, upon which I proceeded to sit down.

" Shall I bring you some tea ? " asked the Abyssinian woman.

" *Tet !* " responded Mâh, clicking her tongue against

her teeth, and throwing her head back, the Persian method of saying "No." And the discreet Nur Jehan disappeared.

"Do you know," she said, "Turkan Khatun and Baghir Khan have gone to Mashad—*Bali?* What is there to prevent our going away now? I have been thinking it all over carefully during my long, lonely days——"

"But you are still too weak!"

"In a little while I shall be quite all right. I am better than you imagine, and if I am still lying in bed, it is chiefly from laziness! I can walk, even though when I stand my head seems to go round after a few minutes. Now that you have come back I shall soon be well, and then we will go, won't we?"

"Would you go to Europe?"

". . . Close to Shiraz there are gardens whose lofty walls rise in the midst of fields of white poppies, and where streams of running water flow beneath the bushes of sweet-scented moss-roses, laving the base of the orange-trees as they pass. . . ."

"But you forget—it is impossible!"

". . . There, too, are marble tanks wherein at night the stars are mirrored, whilst to the soft murmur of the water is united the crystalline burthen of the amorous bulbul. We could . . ."

I closed her lips with a kiss.

Why follow the lure of a dream that can never come true, when our reality is itself a dream?

CHAPTER XIII

THE *KALYAN*

CLAP! Clap! Bibi Mâh clapped her hands—*Clap! Clap!*—and Nur Jehan came running up.

"The lights—all of them—and bring in tea and the *kalyan!*"

And on the *takhtchas*, and even on the floor—all round the room the soft light of the candles shone in the crystal sconces of the candelabra. On the ground, on a copper tray, was placed the *samovar*, surrounded by the tea equipage, a china tea-pot and sugar-basin and two small glasses set in silver holders, with, on a plate, a couple of tiny lemons. And whilst the water was boiling, sending out little gushes of steam, and I made the tea, the Abyssinian woman prepared and lit the *kalyan*.

When I handed her her glass of weak, golden-hued tea, in which floated a thin slice of lemon, Bibi Mâh raised herself to a sitting posture, and placing a lump of sugar daintily between her teeth, imbibed with some noise the scalding liquid, which was sweetened thus as it passed her lips. In this way she avoided the use of the silver spoon, which her orthodoxy considered unlawful, although, as a matter of fact, her religion only forbade its insertion in the mouth. It is for this reason that metal spoons in Persia are always formed of filigree work, or are at all events perforated, so that they can only be used for stirring the sugar in a liquid.

Then came the *kalyan*. I was not quite sure of the

impression which the sight of a pretty young girl smoking the pipe would produce upon me, for I feared the effect of a wooden mouthpiece between feminine lips as much as I appreciated that of a cigarette in the same setting. But in the present instance my fears proved groundless: the picturesqueness of the scene, the charming quaintness of the little lady, the combined grace and gravity with which she performed this all-important action in her leisured life, deprived it of any unpleasant savour.

She took a long pull, and the scented water bubbled in the crystal flagon. I watched the smoke forcing its way through the liquid to the mouthpiece attached to the stem of carved wood, with its turquoise-encrusted bowl of copper, in which were heaped the leaves of moist tobacco topped with charcoal. Then her lips parted slightly, to emit a cloud of smoke that wrapped her round with a transparent nimbus.

At the fourth puff she raised the jewelled bowl of the pipe, and inhaled the smoke that still remained in the flagon and in the stem. Nur Jehan, who was awaiting this moment, knelt down and took the *kalyan* and held it to me, after having also lifted the bowl and inhaled in her turn, not through the mouthpiece, but through the top of the stem, for good breeding requires that not a suspicion of smoke shall remain in the pipe that is offered to another.

I took several pulls at it in my turn, and the *kalyan* was returned, with a repetition of the previous ceremonial, to Bibi Mâh. And thus we continued until all the tobacco was finally consumed, when Nur Jehan removed the pipe.

A mist of smoke filled the apartment, and our senses swayed beneath the influence of a gentle intoxication. Bibi Mâh took my hand and laid it upon her heart. I could feel it beating slowly and regularly, and a sudden vision of the Dreadful Night gripped me. Again I saw

her stretched out motionless upon the floor of my room, again I recalled my vivid joy at detecting the faint pulsations of her heart, after that awful moment of fear when I thought her dead.

" Show me thy wound, *Janam !* " I said to her. " I would dress it to-day myself, as I did those first few days."

She did not reply. I unclasped the brooch in which the folds of her gauzy *chargat* met beneath her chin, and opened her bodice. The bandage lifted, her neck lay revealed, white as milk. To the left the wound, almost healed, was scarcely visible.

" Thou dost no longer hate me, dear one ? "

" *Tet !* " And her head went right back. Her half-closed eyelids fluttered. I was bending over her ; she raised her head, and lifting her shoulder slightly, caressed it deliciously with her cheek and with her chin, which she moved backwards and forwards, a peach upon a cushion of satin.

She saw my agitation, and played with it until the dangerous moment—then . . .

Clap ! clap ! went the little soft hands and, " Nur Jehan ! " she cried, " quick ! bring in the dinner. We are so hungry ! "

Truly—we were hungry !

CHAPTER XIV

A PERSIAN BANQUET

IT was not yet eight o'clock, and the dinner was not ready, for in Persia it is the fashion to dine extremely late, immediately before bedtime, in fact.

So Nur Jehan brought us in those preliminaries to every Persian dinner, tea, toasted pistachio nuts and melon seeds, salted almonds, sweetmeats, and a *kalyan;* and then she retired to prepare the meal itself.

Whilst nibbling at these dainties, with little mouse-like noises, Bibi Mâh suddenly remembered the fact that she was an invalid, and begged me to excuse her taking a short nap, to rest her and to fit her to fulfil later the rôle of hostess with more vivacity. She had really grown paler, and there were dark shadows underneath her eyes.

I wanted to put out the lights and leave her, but she begged me to do nothing of the kind, saying that she would be much vexed if I did not dine with her—it was a red-letter day for her, and she would rest much better for knowing me close by. And therewith she closed her eyes and fell aleep.

I felt a return of my former uneasiness about her, but after a few moments, her face having regained its smiling composure and the dark lines having disappeared from beneath her eyes, I was once more reassured.

Upon the *takhtcha* nearest to me there lay a book, the cover of which, treated in *vernis-martin* style, had depicted on it, on a background of dull gold, primroses at

the foot of tulips and narcissi, above which spread wild roses and peach-blossoms, separated by the branch of a nut-tree bearing three nuts. I opened the book. It was a collection of Bibi Mâh's favourite poems, copied by her own hand, the writing a little uncertain and not always very legible, as in her letters. Here and there I came upon a poem I could understand, but, in spite of my progress in the Persian language, I was stopped at every turn, not only by the carelessness of the writing, but also by the strangeness, to me, of the words. Without the Mirza's assistance literary Persian will continue to have impenetrable mysteries for me for a long while to come.

But the little volume beguiled the time of waiting, and more than an hour slipped away, until at length Bibi Mâh woke up, just as Nur Jehan appeared in the doorway. She smiled when she saw her book in my hands.

"It is yours! I make you a present of it; I brought it with me for you. Yes! I swear it by your salt!"

The Abyssinian woman had removed the tea and other accessories, and had spread in their place, close beside Mâh's bed, a cloth of red leather. Upon this she laid, on either side, a cake of bread, two feet in length and one in breadth, thin, flat, and flexible as a small felt mat, which, indeed, it resembled in colour, upon which she placed our plates. These breads, whose sole resemblance to our own loaves lies in their being made of wheat flour and baked in an oven, are in reality neither crust nor crumb, but something between the two, which baffles our Western palates at first, but to which we quickly become accustomed, ending by finding them excellent. Laid out thus beneath one's plate, they serve at once as table-cloth, napkin, and even spoon, for it is with a morsel of this bread, fashioned so as to form a sort of cup, that one partakes of the soup and sauces. Of course, there are no forks or knives—only little wooden spades with

which to serve the rice, for all meats are delicately helped with the fingers out of the dish.

Nur Jehan then brought four large bowls of coarse faïence, turquoise blue, of a depth of tone to shame the most precious stones of Nishapur. She placed them at the four corners of the leather cloth, in saucers to match. They contained sherbets. A different sherbet had been prepared in each bowl; in one was a sugar sherbet, ordinary *eau sucrée;* in another a sherbet flavoured with syrup of grenadillas; in the third a willow-flower sherbet, said to possess the property of "fattening the thin," as the Persians say. The fourth bowl contained only water, being intended for the lemon sherbet that comes towards the close of the meal, and must be prepared immediately before it is required, to preserve the full bouquet. Bibi Mâh attached quite a patriotic importance to this last sherbet, which must be made of Shiraz lemons, the very best lemons in the world, tiny fruits, scarcely larger than walnuts, their fine skin dried up by the lengthy journey of more than one moon on the back of a camel. Little heaps of snow floated upon the surface of all these sugary beverages, for in Persia the drinks are always iced, even in winter. And one does not partake of them out of glasses, but by means of wooden spoons, one of which lies in every bowl, and which are used in common, with a patriarchal disregard for contagious microbes.

For the use of Bibi Mâh, Mansur had purchased quite a collection of these spoons—in pairs, of course—beautiful utensils, made from the pear-wood of Abada, each one nearly a foot in length, with bowls so finely cut out of a solid block of wood that they had almost the transparency of coloured glass. Inscriptions in high relief were carved on the inside, and their handles were so delicately carved as to resemble lace, there being as many varieties in the pattern as there were pairs of spoons.

To give the final touch to the decoration of our "table," Nur Jehan set out on it rows of oranges—then she brought in the dinner.

The meal consisted of three dishes, served simultaneously; a *pilaw* of rice, surmounted by two boiled doves, the whole covered with a brown sauce flavoured with grenadilla juice, mingled with pounded nuts in clarified butter; skewers of *kebab*, little morsels of lamb threaded on to narrow iron pins, alternating with lumps of fat cut from the enormous tails of the Persian sheep, and seasoned with aromatic herbs and roasted. These skewers were placed on a dish of boiled rice of dazzling whiteness, and absolutely dry, called *chilaw*. The third dish was a sweet *chilaw*, with pistachio nuts and orange peel.

I took my place, sitting on my heels, opposite Bibi Mâh, who, although feeling more rested, retained her recumbent position, raising herself on her elbow after the ancient Roman fashion. Then she washed her right hand from the ewer which Nur Jehan tendered to her, and when I had followed suit, she said, "*Bismillah!*" ("In the name of Allah!") and proceeded to take in her dainty fingers a morsel of the *kebab*, which she ate without appetite. The Abyssinian woman had filled her plate with *chilaw*, into which she had broken the raw yolk of an egg, and, with a simplicity engendered by habit, the delicate Persian lady set to work to mix these ingredients into a kind of paste with her fingers, which also served as the medium for conveying the exquisite morsel to her lips. It was for me an ordeal even more trying than that of the pipe, for, although I had often taken part in both Arab and Persian meals, and had seen the men eating the same way, it was the first time I had ever seen the pretty fingers of a woman I loved serve her as Adam's forks! But again I found that I had no need of the

bandage of love to help me to endure this test, to which the daintiness of Bibi Mâh and the local colour of her surroundings gave, on the contrary, an unlooked-for charm, and when she took from the dish a lump of fat basted with onion and held it to my lips, a great act of courtesy in the East, I consumed it with enjoyment, despite the fact that ordinarily I detested both forms of food.

As I myself had already had occasion to eat with my fingers both in Tunis and here, at the houses of Isfandiar and of Harun-ar-Rashid, I had no difficulty in imitating my companion. Although she only just tasted her food, she preserved the silence characteristic of a Persian meal. I had but little appetite myself, but I enjoyed myself extremely, for the smiles of my hostess were the most exquisite seasoning to her exotic dishes. She drank some of the " fattening-of-the-thin " sherbet, and handed me a spoonful of it—that my nose might become fatter. What joy, to rest my lips upon the very spot that hers had just touched !

At the conclusion of the repast, as Nur Jehan handed us the ewer once more, Bibi Mâh said enquiringly: " Is it true that you have not this custom among the Franks ? "

" Yes ; because we do not eat our meals with our fingers."

" Ah ! of course ! I never thought of that ! I ought to have remembered what the mulla taught me when I was a little girl—that if our Prophet Mahomet had shown us the manner of eating most pleasing to Allah, it was not the less true that the Christians had learnt the use of forks from the teaching of their Prophet, His Highness Jesus."

CHAPTER XV

FROM BIBI MÂH'S ALBUM

A POEM by Shaar-Nali, a Kurdish poet of the nineteenth century:

" O Belovéd, your floating tresses, your undulating form, have overturned the dayspring of my life!

" How comes it that I weep not for the hundred times that you have broken the flask of my heart with the stone of your disdain?

" The Wine of my heart is drawn from the tears which flowed from my eyes. How comes it that this Wine is not spilt, since the flask that contained it is broken in an hundred places?

" Wheresoever you shall come upon water salted or red like blood, this is not because there is salt therein, nor because there blood has flowed. Know you that there is the place of my weeping—tears of blood!

" Though I possess nothing, yet do I desire to see your face. The fatherless, bereft of all, dare yet to appear before the Sun. So am I one fatherless, your face is the sun.

" The passion of my heart is alone the cause of my transports and of my tears; thus fire is the cause of water being poured forth.

" The most famous artist in China would know not how to depict your eyebrows, their arch has not been drawn by human hand, it is a divine creation.

" Nali, the poet, weak as the fibre of the reed, slender

as one of your own hairs, desires to be laid beneath your feet. Trample upon him at your will, but strike him not, and do not spurn him.

" The life of Khazr—the Semitic patriarch who found the Water of Eternal Youth—is not so long as the half of your tresses ; one single hair of which suffices to make a hundred links to enchain the heart that loves you . . . .

" O my Belovéd, your eyebrows are shaped like unto a sword springing sharpened out of the scabbard : their frowns cut with a biting edge the heart that loves you . . .

" The dusky curtain of your tresses covers with the clear shining of your face the heart that loves you . . .

" Say not that the shadow is evil ; for the butterflies know how to discover in the darkness the point of light that attracts them.

" Your eyes feign the intoxication of sleep ; who shall discover whether they slumber already, or whether sleep is able to penetrate them ?

" My sighs have brushed aside the tresses from your countenance, yet your eyes will not behold me.

" The Night vanishes at the breath of morning, day appears ; thus have my sighs caused the face of my Belovéd to appear ; but your eyes are not opened.

" O Sun from whom the light of the stars is borrowed, Nali the poet perishes far from you ; after the same manner at the beginning and the end sprang into life the Moon—too far removed to receive the solar rays."

CHAPTER XVI

THE KINGDOM OF WORDS

WORDS, words, words! And all Persia listens, entranced by the language of the Constitution, soft as the song of the bulbul.

Words, words, words! And enthusiasms wax, hearts overflow, and the seeds of renascent Patriotism expand.

Words, words, words! And the rafters of the Baharistan ring with the utterances of Reform, searching and sweet as some celestial music, bemusing the enraptured populace.

Words, words, words! hurtling like pikes, to crash against the brazen doors of the Palace of the Kajars.

Words, and more words, more and more, jostling now against one another in a clamour of blaring war-trumpets —trumpets of Jericho, crumbling to their foundations the Jericho walls of the *Majlis*.

Ohé! the Kingdom of Words!

The Assembly is gradually losing its prestige, little by little, through its hollow talk, its interminable and barren discussions, whose only result is a schism between the members, now beginning to attack one another. There are violent scenes in which, after the manner of European Parliaments, they hurl the lie in each other's teeth, and the air grows thick with accusations of peculation and fraud. Certain deputies have been accused, perhaps unjustly, of having appropriated fifty thousand pounds intended

as the nucleus of a National Bank, and contributed in voluntary subscriptions by the true Liberals and in forced donations from those suspected of Reactionary tendencies. This sum was confided to the care of one of the Vice-Presidents of the *Majlis*, and the fact remains that it has most mysteriously disappeared.

The Chamber is now divided into three factions, the most important, numerically, being that of the President, around whom sixty-five deputies have ranged themselves. Next in importance comes that, scarcely less numerous, of Sayyid Abdullah, the Grand Mujtahid, and, lastly, there is that of Taghi Zada, the only really patriotic and Liberal Party, which counts but twenty-five members.

Ihtisham-us-Saltana, the President, has lost his popularity; he is suspected of working for his own ends, which some, indeed, hold to include those of the Shah himself, though that is, perhaps, a calumny. This has not prevented him from publicly accusing Sayyid Abdullah and certain members of his party of corrupt and Reactionary practices. The Grand Mujtahid has deemed it beneath his dignity to refute these charges, a line of conduct assumed in reality from motives of prudence, to avoid explanations awkward to himself, if we may believe the rumours current as to his venality.

But the moment is ill-chosen for these internal dissensions, which are the more to be deplored since they will undoubtedly prove another blow of the axe at the base of the tottering pedestal of the Assembly.

The people stand by, heartbroken at this spectacle, watching their hopes vanish away like smoke; all those laws, those reforms, those promises, then, were nothing but words, empty words upon the air!

The Shah grins over it all in the privacy of the *anderûn*, where the fear of assassins keeps him a prisoner. With his Oriental astuteness, he has so managed matters as to

counterbalance every effort of the Constitutionalists, with the object of proving to the people the incapacity of this party ; and now, when he sees it thus destroying itself, he is most gracious towards the *Majlis*, he smiles at the Kingdom of Words !

For some time now the sittings of the Assembly have been entirely taken up with petty quarrels, having nothing in common with the general interests ; personal questions are put before those of national importance. Moreover, few of the deputies are equal to the task they have undertaken ; the majority, as ignorant as their constituents, without the faintest glimmering of social or economic policy, and imbued with the methods of Asiatic autocracy amongst which they have been reared, only look to substitute the absolutism of the *Majlis* for that of the Shah. The stamp of centuries of oppression is not to be obliterated in a single day !

To the brutalities, more or less dissimulated, of Mohammed Ali, these " ignorance people," as I heard them called in doubtful Frankish by a Parliamentarian, retort by brutalities open and gross, and they betray an absolute lack of the very elements of diplomacy in their mode of denouncing his secret relations with Russia.

Incapable of self-restraint, they insult their sovereign in full Assembly, and proclaim his downfall, behaviour which merely lessens their own prestige in the eyes of the world, whereas a more dignified attitude would gain for them the sympathy of everyone, and would increase their authority amongst their own people. When the Viziers strive to give a more serious turn to the discussions, they are treated as slaves of the Shah, or heckled after the manner of unpopular schoolmasters.

Taghi Zada and his few deputies, from their superior standpoint, deplore this state of things, whilst yet they

are powerless to remedy it. The Constitutional Party lacks a real leader, capable of holding in hand this horde that still so sorely needs a master.

Education, instruction—these are the factors by which the real Persian Revolution will be brought about; for the extraordinary intelligence of the Persian, the ease with which he modifies and adapts himself to the exigencies of his surroundings, will one day lead to his astonishing the world. At the outset, indeed, it seemed as if the revolution now in progress would have produced this effect, and if the present moment has disappointed that early promise, there is no reason to despair utterly of its future fulfilment.

In the Kingdom of Words the provinces are the *anjumans*, those councils created by the Assembly as a check upon the abuses of the Governors. They were divided into Provincial, Departmental, and Municipal *Anjumans*, and their action was, in many instances, salutary to the cause of Liberty and Order. That of the Azarbayjan, consisting of two thousand nine hundred and sixty-two members, presided over by Taghi Zada, amongst others, has played a considerable part.

To these official *anjumans* are added unofficial *anjumans* of every kind, such as the philanthropic club of Shah Abad, the Husainiya Benevolent Society, the Club of "The Greatest Profit," for the propagation of instruction, which has organised evening classes—the Telegraph Union Club, the Agricultural Clubs, and many others, amongst which we must not omit to mention the *Anjuman-i-Nisvan*, the Women's Club, where every Friday meet together those desirous of conversing on political and social subjects. By the statutes of the Club members are forbidden to bring children there or to smoke *kalyans*. Including the political clubs, there are

quite a hundred and forty-four in Teheran, a large number of them being a distinct influence for good in the nation. But the "*Iranine*," that contagious malady of the Middle East, which fills the brain with fantasies and loosens the tongue, is spreading little by little in their midst, and to-day the epidemic rages for the greater glory of the Kingdom of Words.

These *anjumans* are springing up like mushrooms. If they all call themselves champions of progress and of public weal, it is none the less true that some of them push their revolutionary principles to the extent of anarchy, whilst others, under titles that stand most strongly for liberty, cloak a reactionary line of conduct.

The Powerful Help humorously classes the clubs amongst the new "purifications" which may be added to those prescribed by religion for those of the Faithful who require to cleanse their consciences from sins against the nation.

"If thou hast passed a considerable portion of thy life," it says, "in the service of the State; if thou hast betrayed it as much as is possible to human strength and power; if thou hast ruined the finances of the Government as much as those of private individuals; if thou hast seized thy neighbour's property on every side; if thou perceivest that things are beginning to go against thee, and that thou art up to thy neck in inextricable difficulties, having thyself made an honourable solution impossible, then, without more thought, without more delay, send for one of those proven blades whom the vicissitudes of fortune have carried away in every sense, one of those men who are intimate with all the world and who know in expert fashion the road that leads to the remedy thou seekest. Sing thou into his private ear a silvery anthem, and tell him secretly thy desire to be admitted into the membership of an *anjuman*. Then, trouble thyself no

longer as to anything; be no more uneasy; disturb thyself no farther; for to-morrow morning the trick will be done.

"To-morrow there will come to thee the invitation to be present at the meetings. Throw together quickly a few words disclosing the beauty of thy intentions, of thy beliefs, and utter them vehemently; enter thy name upon the register of the association, and obtain a card of membership and wear it as an amulet. Then it is that thy sins are wiped out, for the club must protect one of its respectable members!

"And if by reason of the multiplicity of thy faults, and through the indisputable evidence of thy crimes, they desire thee not in any club, and if they repulse thee with their fists in thy chest, yet despair thou not. Return home quietly and send out letters of invitation to thy relations, to thine equals, to thy neighbours. When they are all assembled, say unto them: 'I have called you together with the view to forming an *anjuman;* here are the rules for it, and here is the amount of the subscription list.' From the skies of thy imagination call down some name and bestow it upon thy club. Then can no one say unto thee anything further; who would have the audacity to act in an unseemly manner towards the splendour of thy holiness? who would dare speak evil thereof?"

The satire is bitter, but it goes to show the present condition of popular feeling. There is a grudge against the *anjumans* for their interference in all branches of the administration, and because they have rendered all government impossible by their pretensions to impose the views of their various irresponsible leaders upon the responsible Ministers, views, moreover, which frequently conflict with each other.

As an attempt to evade this new species of autocracy

the President of the *Majlis* has had recourse to private sittings, and even to the creation of a *Majlis Anjuman;* but this has only served to augment his unpopularity, and he has just resigned his post. Last month the position of Persian Minister in London was offered to him, but he declined it, clinging to his seat in the *Majlis.* Now he has left for Europe in a private capacity, and quite suddenly, on April 3rd.

* * * * *

The new President, Mumtaz-ud-Dowla, is brother to the Persian Minister in Paris. He was private secretary to the extremely reactionary Grand Vizier, Prince Ayn-ud-Dawla, a school in which he has learnt a detestation of autocratic ways. For the rest, he is a charming man and a fluent French scholar, and he has been able to give a smoother and more dignified turn to the debates. It is fair to mention that it was Taghi Zada and the Azarbayjan section who supported his election.

This new turn of events has revived all the delightful optimism of Isfandiar and of Mirza Jafar. If the Shah no longer fulminates, it is because he feels himself vanquished. " If he had not had the support of Russia and of England," said Isfandiar, " he would no longer have been on the throne by this time."

" You would have had Zill-us-Sultan in his place," I interrupted, " whom you are blind enough to take for a partisan of the Constitution, whereas, in reality, he is only a partisan of his own claims to the throne."

" The Powers of the Agreement have warned him that all such pretensions must be set aside," said the Mirza timidly.

" Yes, I know," I answered, " but they would probably acquiesce in the *fait accompli* the more willingly since

England could forgive much in memory of an ancient friendship of several years' standing, whilst Russia, apart from all personal question, would look favourably upon any energetic man of his stamp who would fetter the hands of the Constitutional Party."

" I know what you're about to say ! You're going to harp on that same string which the whole European Press is always using to ring the changes to us : not to be in a hurry ; to wait until the new ideas have percolated and been absorbed by the whole of Persia, since, at present, the populace are as much embarrassed by this Liberty which is offered them as was the famished traveller in the desert by the discovery that the bag he had picked up contained, not corn, but pearls. A fine idea that—to wait ! With the knife of tyranny across one's throat !

" We are not ripe for the Constitution ! Perhaps France was ripe in 1789 ? But we are ripe enough to be devoured by the Muscovite Bear or the British Lion ! . . ."

He broke off abruptly, and there was a painful silence until Mirza Jafar began :

" For what do men blame us ? " he demanded in dulcet tones that swelled gradually with the rising tide of his argument. " Have we not given to the world the example of a bloodless revolution ? May we not expect that the most ancient and glorious kingdom in the world, unconquerable hitherto because, the fate of battles notwithstanding, it has hitherto ever remained Persian, should emerge victorious from her present difficulties ? What is the power of Mohammed Ali, and of all the Kajars together, when compared with that of the soul of Iran ? Is their power greater than that of Alexander, who burned Persepolis ? Like his, it must bow before the vitality of the Persian people !

" And, after all, what can the nations of Europe say to us ? Have we not erected an enduring structure ? Let

them look, and if they have eyes to see, they can mark the mosque of a reborn Persia raising high in the firmament of constitutional liberties its massive cupolas and glittering minarets ! "

" But," I interrupted, " you have neglected the foundations, and you have not built up the *Mihrab !* " *

* The Mihrab is a kind of niche constructed in the wall which is in the direction of Mecca in every mosque. All Mussulmans turn to it when praying.

THE KINGDOM OF WORDS

CHAPTER XVII

OMAR KHAYYAM—A PROPHET NOT A PROPHET

April.

IN order to celebrate the return of spring, *à la Persane*, Prince Harun-ar-Rashid invited me to lunch with him at his country palace on Thursday, together with Isfandiar Khan, the poet Shakarlab, of Ispahan, and the dervish and philosopher Murshid Husayn. After the lunch we were all to take tea in my garden at Zarganda, where Yvonne was to join us.

The spring festival was drawing to an end—the spring festival—that is to say, the New Year holidays, for the Persians, as philosophers and poets, begin their year with the awakening of the world from its winter sleep. It was the Thirteenth Day, on which all good citizens of Teheran picnic in the country, in their gardens, or in the shade of trees by the roadside, taking with them little pots in which the wheat sown on the first day of the year—the "New Day," March 21st—is already sprouting. These pots they scatter on the fields as they go—a custom dating, it is said, from the time of Zoroaster.

The Prince's summer palace was situated at the foot of the Elbruz mountains, above Zarganda; we rode there escorted by the numerous suite without which no Persian grandee ever stirs.

It was a glorious day, and all along the road, with its border of poplars dipping their roots in streams of running water, we came upon little groups of the common people

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sitting by the brooks, smoking and listening to the songs of the nightingales that they had brought with them in gilded cages. Here and there knots of women, wrapped in impenetrable black veils, were smoking big water-pipes, without, however, showing their faces.

The Envy-of-Paradise, my host's garden, was on the slope of a dry, stony hill, surrounded by high, battlemented earthen walls. Not a glimpse, before we passed through the massive gateway, could be caught of the fairyland that awaited us.

First came an alley of great plane trees, bordered with a carpet of violets in bloom. Down this we passed to a pavilion decked with tiles—blue, with yellow arabesques—and surrounded by a colonnade reflected in the rippling waters of an artificial lake at its foot. The sun was already powerful, and we could well lunch in the open air, so the servants and cooks sent on before us had laid the cloth on carpets spread out under a clump of peach trees in blossom. We knelt down, Persian fashion, round the cloth, which was already laden with steaming *pilaws*. I was on the right hand of the Prince, and Isfandiar on his left, and at the other end, at a respectful distance, were the poet and the dervish philosopher. A few yards away three minstrels and a singer bewitched the air.

But what delighted me most was the view stretching out before me—a brook running in a bed of turquoise-blue tiles between two long carpets of white and yellow narcissus, till it vanished in an orchard of pear, peach, and almond, all in blossom ; further on, in the pale blue sky, the graceful outline of a peak, shivering in its cloak of snow, and flashing in the sun like a monstrous jewel.

The feature of the lunch, the forbidden fruit of the dessert, was some bottles of old Shiraz wine, which our host, in spite of all stern Mohammedan rules, was resolved to drain to the health of the radiant spring. They brought

us cups of wrought copper, in each of which was engraved some poem in praise of wine. Our poet read out of his cup, with the emphasis and the sing-song accent always consecrated to the delivery of poetry in Persia, these lines of Saadi :

> Bring wine, O cup-bearer ! that shall attire
> My spirit in a royal robe of fire !

Each of us passed his cup to the poet for him to declaim the inscription ; and from mine he read out the quatrain of Omar Khayyam that Fitzgerald has so immortally paraphrased :

> Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring
> Your Winter-garments of Repentance fling ;
> The Bird of Time has but a little way
> To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing.

And it was on Khayyam that our talk ran, a poet whom till then, I am ashamed to say, I had only known by name. However, Shakarlab knew little more of Omar than I ; for like most Persians, he had only heard of the poet as an astronomer and the author of a treatise on algebra. But the Prince and Husayn, the dervish, were great admirers of the *Rubaiyyat*, and gave it a mystic meaning that Fitzgerald would not accept. As they drained many cups of the potent Shiraz they spoke of the great Omar.

" Like the Turkomans," said Husayn, " who shod their horses backwards to deceive those who followed in their track, Al-Khayyami used conventional phrases to spare his philosophic poems the pollution of the profane eye, and, above all, so as not to chafe the orthodoxy of the narrow-minded Mussulman clergy, for whom their true meaning is as ' stinging serpents and combinations rife with malice.' Those who know understand that Wine, with Omar, is Truth ; the Cup is the Universe, and the Tavern, the soul of the Philosopher."

"You call him Al-Khayyami," I said; "why this Arab term? Was he a tent-maker?"

It was Harun-ar-Rashid who answered me.

"Al-Khayyami was the name of an Arab tribe, traces of which existed in the first centuries of Islam; as a Persian patronymic it is quite unknown. The real name of our poet, who has been surnamed 'The Proof of Wisdom,' was Ghiyas-ud-Din Abul Fath Omar, the son of Ibrahim Al-Khayyami. We have no exact information as to the origin of his family; but it belonged, in all probability, to this Arab tribe, and either to escape the persecutions of the Caliph of Bagdad, or, perhaps, to evade a blood feud, it sought refuge in Khurasan, where it evidently prospered and established itself in a certain degree of comfort; for the poet's father could not have afforded the luxury of sending his young son to be educated at the Nishapur College—the most famous and most expensive college of the day—had he not been, in spite of his obscure position, something more than a mere tent-maker—a poor trade enough, especially when we remember that there were scarcely any nomadic tribes at that time in Khurasan, and that those that existed were content to make their own tents."

"But," I hazarded, "I have always heard it said in the Arab districts of Africa, that the education at the Mussulman College was free, and that needy students were even provided with food and clothing gratis, in addition, thanks to the generosity of pious donors."

"That is true, too, up to a certain point, in our country," replied the Prince, "although, as a rule, the students pay for their education, more especially when it is a question of so famous a master as the Imam Mowaffik, who was Omar's tutor. Then, you know, unlike the Arabs, we have preserved our aristocratic prejudices and class distinctions, in spite of the levelling influence of

Islamism, and it is certain that the parents of Nizam-ul-Mulk and of Hasan-ibn-Sabbah would never have sanctioned, any more than I myself should have done, the association of their sons with a young tent-maker."

" Europeans," said Isfandiar, " have a habit of lumping all Mussulman peoples together ; Arabs, Turks, Persians, are all alike in their eyes and their customs must be similar. They forget the fact that our civilisation had been in existence for centuries already while the Arabs and Turks were as yet half savage tribes. It is true, we have embraced the religion of the Prophet of Mecca, but we have adapted it to . . ."

" Hush ! Speak lower ! " interrupted the Prince.

The musicians had ceased playing. They had been given the remains of the meal and were devouring it with the hasty appetite of the improvident grasshopper. The birds took up the song in glory of the spring. Tame hoopoes fluttered round us—they are considered sacred and lucky birds by the Persians, for they were Solomon's messengers to the Queen of Sheba.

Suddenly a breeze passed through the branches, and a thousand petals of peach-blossom covered the ground, filling our cups anew with a rosy, perfumed snow—a snow of Paradise.

" It is not surprising," exclaimed our host, " that Khayyam should have desired that his tomb might be covered every year with blossoms fallen from these trees. Thus it is that, according to the ' Four Discourses ' of Nizami-i-Aruzi, the stone that covers him at Nishapur is hidden every springtime beneath a burden of petals such as are falling now about us."

" I thought his were rose-petals," I objected.

" No," was the reply, " for there is no rose tree upon Omar's tomb any more than on Saadi's. He was buried at the foot of a garden wall, over which hang the branches

of peach and pear trees; and they strewed his grave with flowers."

"I have seen his tomb," put in the dervish. "It is as simple as that of a wise man who cares not to leave any token of his life, except in the hearts of men, so simple, in fact, that it lacks even an inscription.

"It lies apart, in a deserted portion of the Hira cemetery at Nishapur, and there is no trace of wall or garden, or of the trees that should 'shed their blossoms on his grave twice in the year,' according to Aruzi, whom His Highness has just quoted. Nature, indeed, provides the blossoms desired by the poet in the shape of the wild flowers that blow there—to the shame of the Persian nation."

"Not so much so as you would imply," protested Shakarlab. "He was a Sufi, a Freethinker, and such are not beloved by the massers of Mohammedans."

"He was a great philosopher," insisted the dervish softly, "—a great philosopher. And he believed, by the way, in the transmigration of souls. I have read a story which proves this in the Tarikh-i-Alfi. It runs thus:

"At Nishapur there was once an old college in course of repair. One day, as Omar walked there with some students, a string of asses were bringing bricks to this college, and one of them refused to enter the gate. Whereupon Omar smiled, and addressed the beast in the following impromptu quatrain:

> O thou compelled to dree a weary weird,
> How otherwise thy form has reappeared!
> Thy inky nails are crushed into a hoof,
> And that is now thy tail which was thy beard!

"The animal then entered the gate, and the students asked Omar why he had spoken thus. He replied, 'The soul which inhabits the body of yonder ass was once that of a professor in this college, and for that reason would

not go into the place of his former troubles, till he saw that his colleagues had recognised him.' "

And we drank the last cup of snow-cooled Shiraz wine to the memory of Omar, poet, philosopher, astronomer, and humorist.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN MY PERSIAN GARDEN

I FLUNG myself hastily into the saddle and galloped off to meet Yvonne, leaving the Prince and his guests to revel in the delights of hashish.

I came up with her carriage about a mile below the hill, where it had pulled up at a tea-house. Two or three lads were watering the horses, and sponging their heads and pulling their ears down violently, a method of treatment supposed by the Persians to relieve fatigue and renew the forces. Yvonne was reading, comfortably ensconced among the cushions of her victoria, in the shade of a pink parasol.

As I kissed her hand she said reproachfully, " So one has to come out here in order to see you at all nowadays ! Are you so frightfully in love ? "

" I am in love," I replied, somewhat taken aback at the abruptness of the question.

" Come and sit here beside me. I was just reading an old story—*Salammbo*—with its lifelike description of the Oriental woman, and I was thinking of the little Lady-with-the-Velvet-Eyes, who seems, *ma foi*, to have bewitched you, just as Matho was bewitched by the daughter of Hamilcar."

I laughed at the comparison.

" My words seem to amuse you mightily," she went on, " but I can assure you that I, your elder sister, am beginning to grow uneasy as to the future . . ."

"Why always think about to-morrow? Surely to-day is worth living—especially in the company of so charming a woman as yourself, and beneath this parasol, rose-coloured enough to cheer the most confirmed pessimist! . . . What a pretty hat!"

"It arrived this morning—in a distinctly crushed condition."

"It is most becoming! Those wild flowers look as if they had just been gathered, and your hair is the colour of the corn amongst which they were growing. It is a curious thing, but each new hat I see you in seems to suit you better than the last."

"And each new compliment you pay me is more flattering than the last!"

"You know I never say anything but what is true—to *you*, Yvonne, and that you are the most elegant . . ."

"That's saying a great deal, certainly, in Teheran, where all the women are dowds and frumps!"

"Let me finish—the most elegant and the prettiest woman I have ever known."

"You *do* exaggerate! But anyway—I'm only doing my duty. A woman has no business not to look attractive, whatever her means and physical appearance. Otherwise she is not worthy of being a woman at all!"

The horses were rested by now and ready for the ascent. The driver mounted his seat and off we went, Mansur following with my animal.

We had resumed our conversation. Yvonne showed herself as charming and *spirituelle* as ever, and I experienced an indescribable pleasure in listening to her, and in admiring her the while.

"She is my intellectual passion," I told myself, "and if my heart belongs entirely to *the other one*, my mind is altogether hers. This is a kind of polygamy not foreseen by Mahomet, and necessitating no harem, whereby I

remain faithful to the one and to the other, each in her different sphere. The idea may strike one as cynical, but I do not think it is so in reality, for in every one of us there are two identities, each with a separate ideal of its own. Of course, these two ideals may meet and be found in one personality, but when they are distributed, may it not be possible to cultivate them separately with an equal sincerity, an equal enthusiasm ? I am absolutely sincere myself towards each of my ideals, and I do not think I have any preference between them. Yvonne is the complement of Bibi Mâh. I have devoted myself more exclusively of late to the little Oriental. Granted! but that does not prove that the other has not been lacking to my happiness."

It is easier for a man to perceive this point of view than for a woman—a Western woman, perhaps I should say, for the daughters of polygamy know that the heart of man is capricious, and able to accommodate a plurality of loves at one and the same time, and all the more so when the apparent plurality is but a single love in a dual embodiment, complements of one another!

I imparted these ideas to Yvonne, omitting, of course, all personal application. But she has the heart of the monogamous West, and does not believe in the possibility of such distribution of sentiments.

"True love is blind," she said. "If the beloved possesses but one of the two forms of attraction—the physical or the moral—the other must exist in her, for the lover, by imputation, so long as his love itself endures."

"That is only true up to a certain point," I objected.

"No, no, it is an absolute truth!"

We might have gone on arguing endlessly thus, and most likely without ever coming to a final conclusion—the general fate of controversialists—had we not been rudely interrupted by a strident cry :

"*Ya Hakk!*" And a dervish sprang suddenly into view from a shelter of uncemented stones in the very middle of the roadway. He started running after the carriage, and jumped up on to the right-hand step, offering to Yvonne a blade of grass—for want of anything better! Long curls of tawny hair hung down on either side of his emaciated face, which was framed in a ragged, unkempt beard. On his head was a white cone, with inscriptions embroidered all over it in black, and his bare arm, ornamented with a narrow bracelet of black metal, bore a tattooed device. A great gentleness in his eyes and in his whole expression brought out a certain likeness to the pictures of Christ.

Yvonne took the symbolical blade of grass, and the mendicant retired, well pleased with the alms I had bestowed upon him.

"You know you will meet Isfandiar at Zarganda," I said, as we drove on, "and Prince Harun-ar-Rashid, who will probably bring with him the dervish and the poet whom he had also lunching with him."

"You don't mean to say that I am to be the only woman?"

"I had invited Madame Chabret also, but she cried off at the last moment, as she is not very well. She finds this climate very trying, you know. And, I must confess to you, *chère amie*, that I had only regarded her absence from a selfish standpoint, as affording me the opportunity of having you to myself!"

"But . . . these Persians . . . really, I cannot . . ."

"I should never have imagined that the woman, who was strong-minded enough to come out alone to Persia and set up for herself there, would have required a chaperon for a tea-party!"

"Don't joke, please! Think—what will be said of it in the town? There are so many *mauvaises langues* in

the colony, for whom the 'Iranine' has turned to bitterness."

"You needn't worry about that—the colony will know nothing about it. Ah, do come, I beseech you! You have no idea how lovely the garden is looking to-day—the peach trees in blossom . . . Yvonne, believe me . . ."

"You call me strong-minded! Well—after all, I'm going to prove to you that I am very weak! I will come and see the blossoming peach trees in your garden—and the poet and the dervish."

I kissed her hand. "*Ma chère!*" I said, "they are waiting for you!"

"How nice of them!" she laughed.

"Ah—don't," I returned. "I have looked forward to this afternoon—for days!"

Yvonne laughed again. "How nice of *you!*"—then she continued—"I shall be delighted to meet the Prince; I have always considered him a Persian Prince Charming. I often see his wife and daughters, you know. They are perfectly delightful, too, and, like himself, confirmed Liberals. Fancy, they have cut down all their expenses, so as to be able to give more to the good cause! It is curious to see the active part that the Persian women are taking in this revolution. No one in Europe suspects them of it, or realises how much political life there is behind the curtain. They look upon them as dolls, concerned only with amusing themselves. Of course, their education is defective, but as the heart is the best encyclopædia for a woman, it is their hearts that have made of them such ardent patriots, and that have taught them to understand that the salvation of Persia lies in the Liberal movement. There is no woman—even to Isfandiar's wife—who does not dream of the Constitution alone."

"What—*she!* But only quite recently Isfandiar was

complaining to me that she rendered his life unbearable by her narrow ideas and her persistent arguing upon political subjects, and her endeavours to get him over to the Reactionary side ! "

" That is ancient history, *mon cher !* Since her parents departed and she has been removed from the influence of Turkan Khatun, her ideas have changed as if by magic. Such metamorphoses are of frequent occurrence in Teheran. It is by no means uncommon to find a family, supposed to be Reactionary because the father is so, in which the son, returning from Europe, or even just from the *anjuman*, converts to the opposite views his mother and his sisters. Women are more prone to fall in with generous ideas than men. But you have surely heard of that girl who was a perfect revolution in herself ? "

" Do you mean the one who used to go about unveiled, and who earned the nickname of ' *Agha Kutshik* '—' the little gentleman ' ? "

" Yes, that's the one. The fact of her renouncing the veil proves her audacity, for no other Moslem woman here has followed this lead of the Young Turk women, but that was not the cause of her popularity. It was the strength of mind that prompted her, on the death of her father, to earn her own livelihood and support her mother, instead of becoming a charge upon more wealthy relations, as is usual here in such cases. In fact, she lived the life of a European, spoke English, and played the piano and the violin fairly well, and also the mandoline. She died the other day, poor thing, and the crowd that followed her to the grave was the best testimony of the admiration and respect that she inspired."

We were now in the narrow streets of Zarganda, crawling along at a foot's pace, with our wheels subsiding every other minute into one or other of the streams that intersect

the whole place. Progress was decidedly difficult for vehicles, and we looked with envy at a couple of donkeys trotting gaily ahead of us, their riders, a youth and a woman, in the inevitable *chadur*, apparently by no means inconvenienced by the roughness of the way. At length we got to some cross-roads, where at the other end of an avenue we could see Harun-ar-Rashid arriving with Isfandiar and his suite. We drew up and waited for them.

The Prince dismounted to greet Yvonne, and immediately the whole suite was on foot also, and thus we all walked up towards my Garden.

Tea had been prepared in the kiosk of the *anderûn*, from which there is a most lovely view of the mountains, and we sat out on the verandah in our basket chairs to enjoy it—the poet and the dervish squatting near us on the ground.

By the rules of Persian etiquette an invitation always includes the servants of the invited guest, and thus the domestic quarters were invaded by the Prince's following, who assisted my own staff in the *service*, and it was his own valet who prepared and brought him his glass of tea. In a country where "bad coffee" is no uncommon beverage, such a custom is not without a hint of wisdom.

The musicians had accompanied the suite, and they spread their carpet in the garden, on the banks of the stream that, needless to say, flows in its bed of turquoise-blue faïence throughout the whole length of it, and inspired by the murmur of the water, they began to play and to sing, the harshness of their melodies softened by distance into something romantic, if not wholly enjoyable. This, indeed, is the only proper way of hearing Persian music—in a setting which complements and harmonises it—for if it be transcribed and played upon a piano, it is as if one turned the song of the nightingale among the bushes into the piping of a canary in a cage.

"Can you understand what they are singing?" said the Prince to Yvonne.

"Not very well."

"The words are so poetic, so impassioned, so Persian, that you really ought to understand them. I will recite them to you very slowly. Listen!

My heart,
I would have sold it,
Had it not been full of thee:
Mine eyes,
I would have blinded them,
Had they not been illumined by the effulgence of thy face:
My soul,
I would have burned it as a perfume at thy feet,
Had it not been the breath that exhaleth from thy lips!

"I doubt not," he added, "but that it is your presence which has inspired the choice of that song!"

During this little interlude, my attention had been somewhat distracted by the sight of two figures hiding behind one of the bushes at some distance from where we were sitting. One of them was certainly a woman, wearing the usual *chadur*, probably, I thought, the wife of one of the gardeners; her companion, behind her, I could less easily distinguish. As there was nothing out of the way in such an incident—given the curiosity commonly inspired in the Persian mind by anyone European—I did not attach any importance to it at the moment, although my eyes kept straying, almost involuntarily, over in that direction whilst I listened dreamily to the talk around me.

Yvonne had led the conversation on to the subject of dervishes, because of Husayn, whose presence reminded her of our encounter on the Zarganda road. Ever since she first came to Persia she has given alms to these species of mendicant vagabonds—who recall certain of our

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mediæval monastic orders. Every year, at the season of New Year, one—usually the same one—used to come and establish himself at the door of her house, pitching a small tent there, round which he arranged imitation gardens of earth and stones, similar to those which children make upon the sands at the seaside. Like the children, he used to trace out alleys and groves, in which he planted branches of trees, surrounding the whole with a stone wall some few inches in height. Then he spread his panther skin and seated himself upon it, smoking hashish and opium.

Europeans are exempt from rates and taxes in the empire of the Shah, but they are obliged to pay the tax of the dervishes, and this installation before one's door at the season of New Year has no other object than the collection of this impost. Every time that one goes out of one's house one is greeted with noisy cries of "*Ya Hakk!*" ("O my Right!") accompanied by benedictions of all kinds. If one turns a deaf ear, or if the sum given does not come up to the amount at which the dervish has himself assessed one, he has recourse to a fresh argument, generally infallible. Not only does he redouble his invocations, but he also blows with the whole force of his lung power into a horn formed out of a kind of shell found in the Persian Gulf, through which he emits the most ear-splitting sounds. The longer one delays paying, the more frequent are these horrible blasts, at all hours of the day and night, until, for the sake of peace, one is obliged at last to "pay up and look pleasant."

"Why does your dervish wear neither the pelt over his shoulder, nor the axe, nor the calabash of his brethren?" enquired Yvonne.

"Because he is *murshid*," replied the Prince. "That title gives him the right to wear the turban. He belongs to the ancient order of the Ajams . . ."

. . . What *was* going on there behind the bushes? I could now make out a youth, who appeared to be disputing with the "phantom." It seemed as if he was wanting to come across to the kiosk, and that the woman was holding him back. His long grey *kaftan* made a light patch among the budding branches, and his stuff cap, bordered with fur, and pulled down low over his eyes, was not of the kind usually worn by Persians. Where had I seen it before? Ah . . . yes! in the street of Zarganda, on the back of a donkey!

Yvonne touched my arm. "Do listen, Valmont! The dervish is telling us something so interesting!"

Murshid Husayn was describing his initiation. "After I had served my teacher for a thousand and one days," said he, "and he had instructed me in the Seven Marks of the Dervish and the Seven Secrets, and had transmuted the copper of my existence into pure gold by the elixir of his eyes, I appeared before the assembly of the White Beards, and there, leaning my hands upon my knees, I said, in the words of the prescribed formula, 'I am come to make the pilgrimage of hearts.' 'Be you welcome!' replied the Murshid of the White Beards, 'and take great heed that you break no heart. All human beings desire equal recognition as divine creatures, for all must you have the same regard.' And round my body he placed the girdle of the order, made from forty threads united together by knots, the symbol of the forty days of fasting and retreat to which I must give myself up on the morrow, and yearly henceforth . . . . "

. . . The bushes were deserted, the mysterious figure had disappeared. A kind of presentiment came over me, oppressing me strangely.

"And the dervish whom we met on the road?" asked Yvonne.

"He is of the Kaksar order."

" What was the meaning of the tattooed mark on his arm ? "

" Ah, that is a souvenir of the first *murshid*. From the foundation of this order, in India, these mendicant dervishes had possessed a camel that went out begging for them in the villages with a wooden bowl attached to its neck. On one occasion the *murshid* went away for a short time, and on his return the camel was nowhere to be seen. " What has become of it ? " he asked, and having received nothing but the most ridiculous and unsatisfactory answers, he at last began calling to the camel itself, which, from the interior of each dervish, made answer that it had been killed and eaten by them. The holy man then fell into a great rage, and squeezed the arm of his disciple so hard that the mark ever afterwards remained with him."

. . . Yes, there they were again, those figures—there, among the trees. There they . . . But, how ? That youth—those eyes—I could not be mistaken. . . . It was Bibi Mâh ! But what on earth could she be doing here—in that disguise ?

I could no longer restrain myself, and taking advantage of the narrative which was so engrossing the attention of my guests, I rose and strolled furtively down into the garden, making straight for the orchard, hidden bower-like in its girdle of bushes.

There Bibi Mâh joined me, leaving behind her in the outer garden the phantom—Nur Jehan. And I felt so happy at having her there in the perfumed and flowery surroundings of this earthly paradise, that I no longer troubled myself as to the reason of her coming. I embraced her without a thought of the death-warrant I might be signing should we be discovered. Then I stepped back a pace or two to have a good look at her. The disguise changed her without in the least detracting

from her sweet femininity. Nay, the long, flowing lines of her *kaftan* recalled the costume of our womenkind far more nearly than do the too scanty ballet skirts proper to the *anderûn*. Even her toque, similar to those of the Bokhara natives, bore some resemblance also to one that Yvonne wore last winter. She was strangely lovely thus, but there was a pout on her lips. She looked at me steadily and searchingly.

"What is the matter, *Janam?*" I said, "and what *Shaitan* drove you to such a mad act of imprudence as to come here in this dress with your face uncovered? Tell me what has happened. Come now—what is it?"

Oh, those maddening silences when Bibi Mâh is angry! It would be so easy to have it out, but no! this is *her* way—the way of a little, headstrong savage, who makes me miserable! It was some time now since she had indulged in them, and I had come to think that I had been mistaken as to the significance of these dumb sulks, which I had ended by attributing to a species of startled alarm, such as that of a young, caged lioness face to face with her captor.

A thousand pities thus to spoil this lovely spring day, amongst all these flowers and that music. . . . And, since the imprudence had been committed, why should we not at all events profit by it? Our time was precious—even now the moments of our lives might be numbered, if some good genius did not protect us in this garden open to all! We must make what speed we might with happiness before the sacrifice.

I wound my arms lovingly about her and pressed her to my heart. "I love you!" I said.

On the air thrilled the song:

My heart,
I would have sold it,
Had it not been full of thee!

I leant her cheek against my own, and felt the caress of her lashes. "Smile, my own!" I whispered. "Let me see thy smile again!"

And the music-laden breeze echoed:

Mine eyes,
I would have blinded them,
Had they not been illumined by the effulgence of thy face!

"Speak to me, Bibi Mâh!—Speak!"

My soul,
I would have burnt it as a perfume at thy feet,
Had it not been the breath that exhaleth from thy lips!

She disengaged herself from my clasp; the pout of a while back again curled her lips. Why?

I racked my brains without finding any answer, when, all of a sudden, the only possible explanation flashed into my mind. She was jealous of Yvonne—jealous, even, of the song sung in her honour! Indeed, I recognised now in her eyes that look which she had cast at me in the bazar that day Yvonne and I were turquoise-hunting there. And I realised the impossibility of expounding to her those theories which Yvonne had rejected as untenable an hour or two ago, now, when her attitude proved the illusion of my notions on the gentle philosophy of the "daughters of polygamy"!

"My little sweetheart!" I cried, "Thou knowest that I am all thine!"

Two tears pearled up under her lashes. I raised her in my arms to kiss her, but a branch of the tree knocked off her toque, and her hair, just rolled up and kept in place by no other restraint, fell down over her shoulders in silky waves starred with rosy petals.

At the same moment the sound of footsteps and of branches cracking startled me. We were lost!

I turned sharply round, hiding Bibi Mâh behind me,

ready to face the enemy. But, fortunately, the enemy showed himself only under the balloon-like and peaceful guise of Nur Jehan phantom. She had hurried up to warn me that the gentlemen and the lady had come down into the garden and were looking for me.

I left Bibi Mâh in her charge and ran round to the stables, whence I strolled out unconcernedly a few moments later and went to meet my guests. "I have just been seeing that the horses were getting their fodder all right," I explained.

A minute or two later Yvonne got into her carriage, and I allowed her to leave alone. Shortly afterwards the Prince and his suite took their departure. But Isfandiar would not leave me, in spite of my assurances that I should be detained in the garden until late, seeing to things and giving orders to the gardeners and the servants. He insisted on waiting to accompany me back to town. So it was impossible for me to get back to the orchard, impossible to console Bibi Mâh and assure myself as to her safety. I only breathed freely again when I saw two little donkeys trotting off through the garden gateway, one ridden by a *chadured* woman, the other by a youth in a pale grey *kaftan*, with the cap of Bokhara.

CHAPTER XIX

BAGH-I-SHAH

June, 1908.

FRESH clouds in my sky!

I am at Zarganda, and Bibi Mâh has chosen to remain in town; she is once more the wounded bird.

And this time the wound is invisible. I fear I shall not be able to dress it. She is suffering from a fit of religiosity, and frequents the mosques and the tombs of the saints, consults astrologers, and covers herself with amulets purchased from the dervishes. I do not flatter myself that this is the outcome of jealousy. It must rather be due to her false position. Poor little thing, her life is spoilt. There she is, without family, without husband, without companions. Her only society, when I am not with her—that is to say, almost always, since I can only see her by stealth and at night—is Nur Jehan, a slave more or less, good-hearted, but quite uneducated. This woman, moreover, belongs to the hated sect of the Sunnites, and hence is "impure," like myself. What constant torture it must be for the poor Shiite Bibi Mâh to live in a house defiled by the presence of Infidels, to eat food and to smoke pipes prepared by the hands of impurity, to be loved by a man destined to eternal fire!

If Baghir Khan had returned from Mashad she would doubtless go back to him, but he is too far away for that.

I am most unhappy about it all, the more so since I can do nothing. It is all my fault, indeed, but it is still more the fault of that inexorable and blind Destiny in which she believes.

My passion for her is still as strong as ever ; she is herself most loving at times, yet, as in our earlier days, I have to begin my conquest of her afresh on every occasion. And then there is a considerable interval between my visits, which are rendered difficult, moreover, by the distance between Zarganda and Teheran, and every day I fear to learn that she has fled.

. . . . .

Meanwhile political matters have taken their course, and the struggle between the *Majlis* and the Shah has reached an acute crisis. At the end of May the aged Azud-ul-Mulk, the head of the Kajar tribe, he who, in case of the death of Mohammed Ali, would become Regent, strove to act as intermediary between the two hostile parties. The Assembly demanded the dismissal of Bahadur, Shapshal, and four other counsellors of His Majesty, who promised to accede to this demand on condition that the *Majlis* first prevented the Liberal papers and orators from speaking against him. They came to terms, and on the one side the courtiers were banished, with the exception of Shapshal, whose position as a Russian subject exempted him from the measure, and on the other side the papers and the speakers kept silence.

A few days later, on the morning of June 4th, two thousand horsemen of the Silakhuri regiment scoured the town, yelling and discharging their rifles. The people, terrified, and thinking that the town was about to be looted, shut themselves up indoors. It was merely a stratagem to divert public attention and allow the Shah to leave the town, escorted by the Cossacks, with Shapshal and Liakoff riding on either side of the carriage, and to proceed to one of the palaces, called the Garden-of-the-King—Bagh-i-Shah—outside the walls, close to the western portion of the town.

A terrible apprehension pervaded the whole of Persia when this change of residence became known. At any other time it would have had little significance, now it was interpreted to mean open war. The Shah, indeed, surrounded himself with troops, called them in from wherever he could, with their field artillery, and took possession of the telegraph offices. He ordered the arrest of the son of Zill-us-Sultan and other persons of high rank, and as the Nationalists were preparing to defend themselves as they did at the time of the *Coup d'État* of December, the rumour got about that a certain Power would intervene in case of the Shah's life being threatened. Martial law was then proclaimed, with Liakoff in command. The bazars closed. Ten thousand men collected in the mosque of Sipah-Salar, and hung up a huge placard upon which were recorded the twelve individual instances in which the Shah had violated his oath to observe the Constitution. Liakoff sent them an ultimatum ordering them to disperse, in default of which he would employ armed force. On the advice of their leaders they obeyed, but with tears and groaning.

Mirza Jafar was of their number. For some time he has been in an excited condition, and he devotes himself almost entirely to the Cause of Liberty. I rarely see him now. On leaving the mosque he came round, and bade me a pathetic farewell.

" I have vowed my heart to death," he said, " and am on the eve of following the bloody road which will be opened to us by the scimitars of that unprincipled and bloodthirsty young man who occupies the throne of Cyrus. If I do not perish in the fight, and if we are the victors, may Allah be praised ; but I will not survive defeat ! Farewell, then, Allah alone knows if I shall ever see you again."

It was difficult for me to make out the true sense of this

speech. I knew that the Nationalists, through fear of foreign intervention, had decided not to have recourse to arms in their struggle against the Reactionaries, and I supposed that it was this resolution of passivity that had thus demented the Mirza, as it had driven to suicide Mahdi Gav-Kush. This rabid Liberal had a wife more rabid than himself, and he preferred death to the dishonour of facing her after having capitulated to Liakoff without striking a blow.

Had Mirza Jafar decided either to kill himself also, or to assassinate the Shah ? What was the fight to which he alluded, since there was to be no battle ? The very exaggeration of this language reassured me. It was, as always—Words !

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST MOON

EACH day the Shah's designs become more patent. As his forces increase he proceeds to fresh exactions. On the 12th he demanded the expulsion from Teheran of Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din, of the Editor of *The Trumpet of Israfil*, of the Prince Zahir-us-Sultan, his cousin, and Commander of the Nationalist Volunteers, of Isfandiar, and of other eminent Liberals.

Taghi-Zada strove to assuage the storm of anger provoked by these and similar acts, and urged his party towards negotiations, saying to them, " Do not question why, but believe me we must remain peaceable and Constitutional, otherwise there will be an end to Persia."

The Shah made a pretence of listening to them, and took advantage of the time gained to get ten thousand pounds out of Mukhbar-ud-Dowla with which to ensure the fidelity of his troops, and to bring in to the Garden-of-the-King all the arms and ammunition within reach, whilst Liakoff disarmed a large number of the citizens. Bahadur had not gone far away, he had taken refuge in the Russian Legation at Zarganda. He returned to the side of his master, and the other courtiers in so-called exile did the same.

The expelled Liberals, on the other hand, with Isfandiar at their head, would not abandon their brothers at such a moment. They contented themselves with taking sanctuary in the mosque of Sipah-Salar, where

very soon they were joined by all their partisans. Once more, as in December, the Mosque and the College of Sipah-Salar and the Baharistan were filled with Constitutionalists, but this time they were mostly unarmed.

The town had resumed the desolate aspect of last winter, insecurity once more became menacing, robberies and assassinations redoubled. Nur Jehan having informed Mansur that suspicious characters were prowling about in the neighbourhood of his house, I sent him back to town, advising him to remain indoors, to arm himself, and to keep good watch ; and I gave up visiting Bibi Mâh until quiet should be restored.

However, on Monday, in the blank that is created around me by the absence of the Mirza, of Isfandiar, and even of Harun-ar-Rashid, who is also in the town, possibly, even, a refugee in the Baharistan, I was overcome by an irresistible desire to see Bibi Mâh. So, at nightfall, I went down to Teheran. I had previously been for my customary ride, accompanied as usual by the groom who has taken Mansur's place. To get rid of him, I sent him with a message to Vecquincourt, and when he had disappeared behind a clump of trees, instead of returning to my Garden, I galloped off towards the south.

On reaching the town I went home first, to the Street of the Tulip-bed, to leave my horse. I found the door open and no *karaul* on guard. As I entered they all four came running in from the house next door. I lectured them soundly. They excused themselves in Azari-Turkish, the language of their tribe, with which I am not acquainted. I confided my horse to them, and sent one of them to fetch some barley, and I made them feed the animal in my presence, lest, when my back was turned, these savages should sell it back again to the dealer—a favourite practice with Persian servants. Then,

as it was still too early for me to risk going to Mansur's, I determined to go and dine at the Club.

As I passed Baghir's house I noticed a great stir going on, and I enquired the reason.

" His Excellency the Magnificence-of-the-Royal-Intimacy is on his way back from Mashad, recalled by the Shah," was the reply. This meant much to me, from every point of view. . . .

In the Club there were only two or three Europeans, at a loose end like myself on this hot evening. Small tables were laid in the garden walks, badly lit up by a few lanterns suspended from the trees. It was silent and melancholy, and as there was nothing ready, it was not until ten o'clock that I got my meal.

I was listlessly chewing the tough wing of a chicken that an hour earlier had been still experiencing the joy or the sorrow of living, when a hand fell on my shoulder, and Vecquincourt's voice broke the silence. " What—*you* here ? "

He had come into town about five o'clock, at the suggestion of the Minister, to have an unofficial talk with some of the political leaders, so as to gain information on the situation, and he seemed well satisfied with the latest news. The Shah, who a few days earlier had refused to receive a deputation of six members of the *Majlis*, and who, in reply to a memorial submitted to him by them, had said, " By the sword the Kajars took Persia, by the sword I mean to hold it "—had just this very evening accepted the proposal to form a mixed Committee of Royalists and Constitutionalists, to bring about an understanding between the two parties.

" All is for the best in the best of worlds ! " cried my colleague with a Machiavellian smile. " Will you still accuse me of pessimism ? " And after having drunk an iced sherbet, he went out to his carriage to return to Zarganda.

It was close upon midnight when I knocked at Mansur's door, three consecutive raps, then one rap, and again three raps. In this heat Mansur slept on the terrace; he soon recognised me, and came down to open to me.

There was light in Bibi Mâh's room. I went in. She had not yet gone to bed, but was seated on some cushions, a book in her hand. When she saw me she laid the volume aside and covered it with a silken scarf.

We exchanged compliments and salaams; I thought her a trifle ceremonious. Her lips smiled, but her eyes remained mournful. I was evidently not welcome. In Persia they do not talk about the weather, since it is not changeable, but there are instead compliments and stereotyped phrases to which they have recourse when they have nothing to talk about. We had got to those phrases! I was so much upset by this cold reception that I did not know what to say.

There was a silence.

To break it, I asked her what was the book that she was reading. She frowned, and replied, "Nothing!" I was going to lift the scarf to pick it up. She grew pale, her lips compressed, and she cried in an angry tone, "Do not pollute with your touch the sacred book!" It was her Koran.

A fresh silence.

Never had she shown herself so fanatical. Poor little girl, she was more to be pitied than I was. Was this the end? Did she wish to leave me? My heart bled. I hated to feel that she was unhappy. Some decision must be come to. I remembered Baghir.

"Baghir Khan is coming back," I said.

"When?" she enquired, starting.

"Very soon, for they are getting the house ready for him."

"Then I had better go."

" You will return to him ; he will forgive you ! "

" No. I must go away on a pilgrimage, for with Baghir Khan in Teheran I should no longer be safe here. I will go and ask Fatima the Pure in her sanctuary at Kum to protect me, and to counsel me as to the future."

" You shall do as you please, dear Bibi Mâh ! "

She looked at me in astonishment, and I added, " Nur Jehan shall continue to serve you, and Mansur to protect you, and when you wish to return they shall bring you back."

She reflected.

" But they are Sunnites ! And I have an aunt in the holy city, who will receive me."

For the first time her eyes avoided mine. She was not speaking the truth.

In the end I convinced her of the impossibility of undertaking such a journey otherwise than accompanied by Nur Jehan and Mansur.

" When do you wish to start ? "

She bent her head without replying. Then, after a pause, accentuated by the distant yelping of the jackals on the plain, she took my hand and drew me into her arms. We embraced each other. She wept. Her hot tears flowed down over my cheeks. Her heart beat against my breast. I had found my Love again.

We remained for a long time locked thus in each other's arms. One after another the lights had flickered and gone out. Through the open window came the warm breath of the night, and the late-risen moon—the Full Moon, turning towards its last quarter—shed a milky light into the room. Bibi Mâh started and leant forward.

They looked at each other face to face.

From the distant plain came the yelping of the jackals.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SECOND *COUP D'ÉTAT*

THE next day, Tuesday, June 23rd, I was in the saddle at an early hour. Vecquincourt's hopeful news had reassured me as to Isfandiar's fate, and I resolved to go round by his house on my way to Zarganda. If he had not yet returned, I should at all events find his orderly, Ahmad, in possession of the latest intelligence.

The house stood not far from the Azarbayjan *Anjuman*, and thus close to the Baharistan. As I came in sight of the Square opposite the Palace of the Parliament, I noticed a body of about two thousand persons headed by the Mujtahid Sayyid Abdullah, the "Father John" of Persia, making for the door of the Sipah-Salar Mosque. I pulled up my horse in an adjacent side street and questioned a passer-by.

"Some Cossacks went into the mosque just now," he told me, "alleging that they simply came, as good Mussulmans, to make their morning prayer; but it is feared that they may have evil designs against the Nationalist leaders who have taken refuge there, or against the *Majlis*—for they have closed the doors behind them. The news having spread, Sayyid Abdullah hastened up with his followers, and he is now preparing to request the Cossacks to open the doors."

After some parleying, I saw the doors open indeed and the Cossacks come out. I crossed the Square, and as I was entering the *cul-de-sac* in which Isfandiar's house lies,

NATIONALIST TROOPS GUARDING THE PARLIAMENT

(FROM A PERSIAN NEWSPAPER)

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I saw some mounted Cossacks emerging, with six field guns. They drew up in front of the Baharistan and the mosque, into which the Sayyid and his followers had hastily retreated.

It was becoming interesting. At the same time, it behoved me to avoid attracting attention, so I knocked at Isfandiar's door. Ahmad was there. He could tell me nothing about his master beyond what I already knew through public rumour.

The report of a rifle startled us. He wanted to open the street door and look out, but I dissuaded him. It was better to go up on to the terrace, where, concealed behind the parapet, it would be easy to see without ourselves being seen. Two other Bakhtiyaris, who were there to lend a helping hand to Ahmad in case of danger and to protect Zarin Taj and the women of the *anderûn*, followed us up, armed with rifles.

From above we had a full view of the Baharistan, with the mosque of Sipah-Salar to the right, and to the left the palaces of Zill-us-Sultan and of the Princess Banu Ozma and the Azarbayjan *Anjuman*.

Regiments of every description were pouring in from all sides, and there were to be seen also Nationalists hastening towards the Parliament House—amongst them Taghi Zada. The Cossacks barred their way, and they were obliged to turn back. Then Colonel Liakoff drove up, issued his orders, and stationed the guns in six different positions. A message was brought to him from Sayyid Abdullah ; he refused to listen to it.

A soldier fired at the escutcheon over the entrance door of the Baharistan. Immediately a volley rang out from behind the walls, killing several Cossacks, and the battle opened on both sides. The guns fired in every direction, not only upon the Parliament House, the palaces of Zill and of his sister and the *anjumans*, but also upon the

mosque. That was a monstrous sacrilege in the eyes of the Mussulmans, and the first shot sounded the moral downfall of Mohammed Ali. What shame could be greater than that of having recourse to Infidels to bombard a sacred monument of Islam, crowded with Believers and high ecclesiastics and descendants of the Prophet? The effect was instantaneous. Many of the Cossacks would have fled, to avoid participating in the sacrilege, but the shooting down of several by their Russian officers arrested the movement. At the same time about fifty foot-soldiers tore off their red tunics and, handing their rifles to the Nationalists, implored them to receive them into their ranks.

There was a moment of indecision; then Bahadur's savage troops came up, and the fusillade and cannonade began again as vigorously as ever. Some shells passed over our heads, to fall bursting upon the *anjumans*, which they destroyed like card castles.

The palaces of Zill and of Banu Ozma offered scarcely more resistance. The Baharistan collapsed also, but its defenders, thanks to a well-directed fire, succeeded in putting three of the six guns out of action. They did not, however, attempt to capture them. As for the mosque, the shells, powerless against its massive walls, could do no more than shatter its covering of tiles and dig holes in the cupolas. From the height of its minarets men were firing; among them I thought I distinguished Mirza Jafar.

The Russian officers moved freely about the Square, issuing their orders; not one was touched by a bullet. It was evident that the Nationalists were exerting all their skill as marksmen to avoid hitting them, in the fear of a Russian intervention—a misfortune they dreaded above all others. One of the Bakhtiyaris, Ahmad's companions, ignorant of this detail, would have fired upon Shapshal.

He rose, and was shouldering his weapon, when a ball struck him full in the chest, and he dropped down motionless. I felt his pulse ; a few irregular beats, and then no more. He was dead. " We will avenge him ! " cried Ahmad and the other Bakhtiyari. I had the greatest difficulty in restraining them from firing, which would have meant certain loss for us, and no doubt also the destruction of the house. " Let us carry this man below," I commanded.

Our position was a dangerous one. The parapet of dried earth, behind which we crouched, formed but a feeble rampart. On coming up to the terrace I had removed the cap, which would have betrayed the presence of a Frank, and as the hour advanced the sun became a fresh enemy, my hands no longer sufficing to shield me from it. And where was the use of remaining there before this spectacle of destruction and death ?

We crept back to the staircase therefore, so as not to afford a target to those below, and went down, carrying the body. It reminded me of an almost identical scene of the previous winter. My heart tightened.

We had scarcely reached the court when a woman, enveloped in a *chadur namez*, which she drew over her face, approached Ahmad. At the sight of the corpse she gave a shriek, echoed immediately from behind the curtain at the door of the *anderûn*. Ahmad pushed her into a corner of the court, and I heard them whispering there in animated fashion, whilst with the other Bakhtiyari I carried the dead man into an adjacent chamber.

The noise of firing grew less, the guns were silent. Ahmad went up again on to the terrace. When he came down, he made straight for the door of the *anderûn*, and very soon three women came out, phantoms in black *chadurs*, beneath which were concealed bundles. They followed him first of all to the gate, which he opened

slightly, to close it again, and then on to the roof. The Bakhtiyari had joined them. I remained alone with the corpse.

After some time, as I heard nothing more except the confused sound of voices on the Square, mingled with savage exclamations, I realised that I had been given the slip, and that, doubtless from fear of a pillage after the fight—an Asiatic tradition—Zarin Taj and her women had fled by the aerial route from terrace to terrace, a safer way than that of the street. There was nothing left, therefore, but to depart myself. I took the mundane way, leading my horse.

On the Baharistan Square the Nationalists had been completely routed. Those who had not been able to escape had given themselves up, and were being taken away in hundreds by the soldiers. I recognised Sayyid Abdullah, who was driven along by a Cossack with blows from the butt-end of his rifle.

But Bahadur's gang, caring little about these police duties, were busy pillaging the bombarded palaces. I mounted my horse and made my way towards the Legation, in order to telephone to the Minister at Zarganda, and as I turned for a last look at these ruins, lit up by a fierce summer sun, I saw upon a minaret the silhouette of a man, with his arms raised to heaven, as if calling it to bear witness to all these disasters.

CHAPTER XXII

"GONE!"

THE Constitution was done for. Martial law reigned supreme; Liakoff was Military Governor of Teheran. He arrested as many as he could find of the Constitutionalists. Happily Isfandiar, Jamal-ud-Din, and others had fled, and Taghi Zada, with about forty Liberals, amongst them the editor of *The Powerful Help*, had taken refuge in the British Legation. As for the Mujtahid Sayyid Abdullah, with numerous others, he was put into chains at the Garden-of-the-King. The Shah caused the Prince-of-Preachers and the Editor of the *Trumpet of Israfil* to be strangled, and condemned to death Zahir-us-Sultan. But the latter's mother, the aunt of His Majesty, declared that she would kill herself if her son were executed. He was accordingly released, and has left for Europe.

As the houses of suspects were being searched, which enabled the soldiers to wreak their private vengeances, I was afraid for Bibi Mâh.

Baghir Khan had been received with open arms at the Garden-of-the-King, whither he had sent an advance guard of several bags of silver. Had Zarin Taj returned to him?

I had remained in town, but I dared not venture to Mansur's.

To kill time I took an early ride and went to the Legation to see if there were not some telephone message

from the Minister. On my way I saw that the approaches to the British Legation were guarded by Cossacks, who stopped all comers suspected of wishing to take refuge there. Liakoff showed thus that his victory over the Liberals and their protectors was complete, and he went so far as to threaten violation of one of the most sacred laws of international right. This increased my anger against this military brute, and I felt the need for a gallop over the plain as a sedative.

After calling at the Legation, therefore, I rode out of the town. The chances of my gallop led me to Ashrat-Abad. I stopped at a tea-house to rest my horse, and in the shade of some enormous elm trees, whilst watching the flow of a stream, I lived over again all the dark hours of the last few days. The mid-day sun kindled the plain with its blinding rays. It was certainly too hot to ride any more. I waited, and lunched off two slices of melon and some tea. Then I walked back to the town, which I entered by the Shimran Gate.

The palace of Zill was on my road. The gate of the grounds stood wide open. I went in. A large portion of the façade of the building had collapsed, as if through an earthquake, and the rooms, emptied by the looters, contained only debris. Of all the treasures of this house, the most sumptuous in Teheran, only a single frame remained hanging upon a wall. It contained a page of *The Illustrated London News*, on which were reproduced the portraits of all the sovereigns who had been assassinated in recent years. The irony was bitter! It seemed to furnish material proof of the murderous projects of Zill, and an excuse for the bombardment. Further on, at the Baharistan, there was the same litter of plaster, bricks, and broken mirrors—the same desolation. I went sorrowfully away.

Upon his minaret, that aerial prison, the Nationalist

who had refused to surrender was still perched. He had evidently sat down, for only the top of his *kula* was now visible. What horrible sufferings he must be enduring from thirst and hunger!

On returning home I found a line in Arabic from Mansur. He informed me that he had sought me in vain through the town, and had telephoned to Zarganda to let me know that Bibi Mâh Khanum had given him instructions to order a carriage to start for Kum that very evening, two hours before sunset. As she assured him that this had been arranged with me the previous evening, he had considered it his duty to obey so far as to order the carriage, but he refused to leave without a line from my hand confirming the orders.

My brain reeled as if under a heavy blow. I ought to have been prepared for this; but Bibi Mâh had shown herself so affectionate the previous night, and she had already faced so many dangers with indifference . . .

It was true, then, that she was going in an instant, that I could not even embrace her.. Mechanically I wrote to Mansur, "Do whatever is commanded thee!" and I sent the message by a *karaul*. I sank into a chair, and my eyes filled with tears. For several minutes I was prostrated.

She was going without asking to see me. Then I had not even succeeded in understanding her. The wall of the harem had remained impenetrable. And who knows whether I should ever see her again now?

No! At all costs I must see her, must press her in my arms. I loved her too dearly to part from her thus.

The *karaul* had returned; he handed me a note addressed by Mansur. Inside was a line from Bibi Mâh. "Thou hast given me the sweetest of dreams. Au revoir, if it pleases Allah!"

I rushed to the stable, saddled my horse with the help of the *karauls*, and reached Mansur's door at full gallop.

Never mind what came of it, I *must* see her. I knocked at the door—three knocks, then one, then three again. No answer. I knocked again, louder, without counting the strokes of the knocker. A neighbour from his door-step called out to me, "*Raftand! Raftand!*" ("They have gone away!") Too late!

I put spurs to my horse and flew through the town like a madman.

Raftand! The street curs pursued me and bit the legs of my horse, making him kick and rear. A patrol of Cossacks had stopped some waggons and were examining their contents, thinking to find Nationalists hidden inside them. They filled the road. I resolved to go round some other way, it would be quicker than waiting until a passage should be made.

Raftand! Raftand! But I lost myself in the inextricable dædalus of deserted streets, and had to retrace my steps. And then some camels in a long string, one behind the other, which the gallop of my horse alarmed, entangled themselves in their traces, and stood still stupidly, growling. A few more precious minutes wasted. *Raftand!*

I slackened my pace at the gate of the town, on account of the number of vehicles and beasts of burden that were trying to get in and out at the same time as each other, in a confusion accentuated by the yells of their drivers and the customs officials.

Then at last I was on the road to Shah Abdul-Azim, the favourite shrine of the Teheranis, where Bibi Mâh would stop until the morning.

The landscape stretched out in monotonous barrenness; it is peculiarly ugly and desolate on this side. A railway, the only one in Persia, skirts the route for some miles, as far as Shah Abdul-Azim. In the dust of the road I could plainly see several vehicles, but there was no sign

THE PILGRIMAGE MOSQUE OF KUM

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of Mansur. Some distance ahead I descried a caravan. I had soon caught up with it.

After the manner of caravans, it was taking up all the road, the beasts being left free to choose for themselves what part of it they preferred to walk on. They have a marked preference for the edges, and those which had not found a place there wandered from right to left along the centre, in the hope of getting in somehow. A strange caravan! On either side of the mules there hung long wooden coffins, shrouded in felt. Within were corpses proceeding to the sanctuary of Kum, for interment in the cemetery sanctified by the tomb of Fatima the Pure, and by the invisible presence, on Fridays, of her brother His Highness the Imam Riza, who for centuries has come from Mashad every week to visit his sister. In the confusion of their amblings the mules jostled the coffins irreverently against one another; the muleteers, and the relatives of the deceased who followed, restored their balance when they threatened to fall. A mulla was chanting prayers; some women seated in *kajavas* slung on either side of mules were uttering lamentations.

Not without difficulty I succeeded in outstripping the caravan, and at some little distance I recognised the silhouette of Mansur. He was riding beside a carriage—the carriage of Bibi Mâh!

Raftand! Yes, they were gone. Gone for ever! . . . Why had I followed that dusty, dreary road? To see the phantom of my love vanish in the distance among the dead! Why?

With that fanatical multitude swarming along the way I could not approach her without danger to herself; I could not speak to her; I could not even wave farewell to her! Then why strive to rejoin her? Why this mad race towards an impossible goal?

Beneath the lowered hood of the vehicle I made out the back of Bibi Mâh's head; her white *ruhband*, with its turquoise fastening, encircled the folds of her *chadur*, giving them the appearance of a mummy's wrappings. A sharp pain, as from a dagger-thrust, shot through my breast. I pulled up my horse, and remained motionless, hypnotised. The caravan of the dead had soon overtaken me. The coffins filed by on either side, brushing against me like shadows of the Inferno, catching in my legs, as if to drag me with them.

The sky took on a purple tinge, a boisterous wind raised volumes of dust, covering with a cloud the receding vehicle.

Raftand! They had gone!

. . . . .

Along the arid, desolate plain I galloped recklessly, to drown my thoughts. Clouds, that the setting sun stained with the blood of his dying rays, were piling up to the north over the mountain peaks. A flock of ravens, driven before the gale, passed croaking above my head.

Night fell. Mutterings of thunder resounded dolefully, reverberating in distant echoes among the mountains. My horse stumbled and went down, and I was thrown on to a heap of stones. We got up together, both uninjured. Flashes of lightning streaked the sky. Oh, that heap of stones! It was there that a few days previously an adulterous woman had been stoned to death. I got into my saddle again.

An hour later I arrived at Yvonne's Garden, near Zarganda.

The storm had burst, great drops of rain were falling.

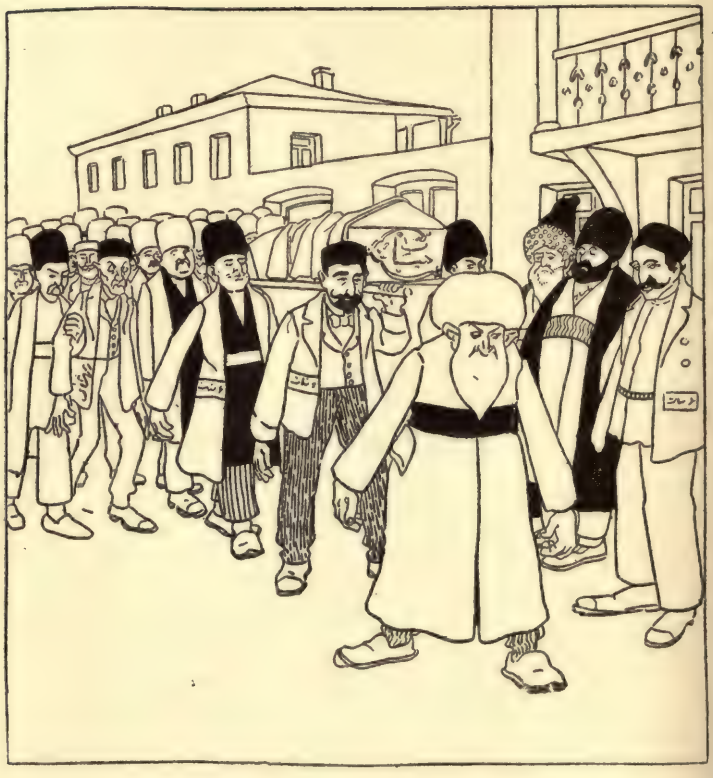
I was shown into the drawing-room. She was not at home, but was expected every moment. I sat down. The heat was stifling; the windows had been closed on

account of the tempest, which was now at its height. The rain fell in torrents, and the thunder pealed with the fury of an Apocalypse, shaking the whole house, down to the Ispahan roses in a copper vase beside me, which trembled on their long stems.

Within me a storm was breaking also, and upon my heart the rain fell in a copious shower ; but the heat and the overpowering scent of the roses plunged me little by little into a profound stupor, which deadened all sensation. As the elements without subsided, so the storm within me abated, and presently there was absolute peace—a silence as of the tomb, broken only, from time to time, by the scarcely perceptible sound of petals that loosened from the dying roses and fell dropping at my feet.

PART IV

LAST QUARTER



THE FUNERAL OF THE CONSTITUTION

(FROM "MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN")

CHAPTER I

MY DEPARTURE

MY dream is shattered, all is at an end! Beneath the ruins of so many fallen hopes I lie prone upon the earth, crushed and stifled, and with no more strength for the daily round which alone is left to me.

My chief saw that there was something the matter, although he was far from guessing its true nature or cause, and, out of pure kindness, by way of "distracting my mind," he arranged for me to be transferred temporarily to Tabriz, now also in a state of revolt, as *locum tenens* for the absent Consul there. Nor did he, on this account, excuse me from my report on the political situation, which I am to send him on arrival, for transmission to the Foreign Office—that quarterly report which forms one of those tasks, more or less useless (being merely a *résumé* of the Ministerial despatches), created to employ the leisure and train the mind of the budding diplomat. It would serve to keep off the black butterflies, he said. The jest is a cruel one, but it leaves me cold—I am past caring for cruelties of the sort!

I have been on my way three days now, travelling with Madame Chabret, who has been driven out of Teheran by the combination of political and climatic temperatures, and whom I am escorting as far as Rasht, and across the Caspian Sea to Astara, where I leave her, to push alone to Tabriz, by way of Ardebil. The "Vizieress" is travelling quietly this time, as a private individual,

going through without stopping, and she smiles over the recollection of her magnificent arrival with all the *impedimenta* of a Princess of the Arabian Nights. Her own maid, my servant, and an escort of two of the Legation *gholams* composed the whole of our suite, and our sole luxury consisted in the certainty of finding accommodation and relays of horses in readiness at the various posting stations along our route. Orders to this effect had been telegraphed through by the courtesy of the Vizier for Foreign Affairs.

This evening, owing to her excessive fatigue, Madame Chabret retired to rest directly after our frugal dinner of preserved food; and, to ward off my black butterflies, I have been writing this page of my journal, and shall now resume the interrupted sketch of my report.

This post-house lies high up on a bare mountain side, and for the last time I am breathing in the pure air of the Iran tablelands. To-morrow will bring me to Ghilan, to an atmosphere of malarial humidity and to a very different kind of scenery.

When I think of . . . But no! I must not think of that. I must merely jot down dry notes upon the political situation in this journal, in which my pen has so often recorded the deepest emotions of my heart!

. . . . . .

. . . Nevertheless, in spite of Anglo-Russian representations, the Shah remains obstinate, a hardened Reactionary, refusing, moreover, formally and by means of stratagem, to convoke a fresh Parliament. Like Artaxerxes of old, who, with the idea of promoting religious unity, convoked a *Majlis* of the Magi from all parts of the kingdom, and then, little by little, reduced their numbers from eighty thousand to seven persons whom he could easily control, Mohammed Ali thinks to

create a Council of State composed of forty members, chosen by himself from among the Conservative aristocracy, to whom he proposes to confide the task of making a new electoral law, by which means the portals of the Parliament would only reopen to such as he deemed fit to figure therein.

Must we see in this subtle arrangement the occult and insidious influence of Russia, as is thought by the Persian Nationalists, who assert that Russia is playing a double game, and that she has two policies—one which she shows in her collaboration with England, and one which she conceals in her collaboration with the Shah? The Nationalists affirm that if His Majesty were not clandestinely supported by Russia he would never have dared to do what he has done. And the *coup d'état* of June last is regarded by the Persians as a Russian victory over England; for in their eyes the Parliament, Liberty, and Reforms are identified with England, the Shah and his Reactionary circle with Russia. Thus England triumphed so long as the Liberal Party gained ground, and Russia recovered her position with the revival of the Shah.

In spite of the fact that a political change in Persia would not be without a most serious effect upon British dominion in India, it appears evident that England, with a marked disinterestedness, has not concealed her favourable sentiments towards the revolution. On the other hand, Russia has, with difficulty, dissembled her sympathy for the Reactionary Party. It would seem that the Russian Government is desirous of placing the responsibility of this line of policy upon its Minister at Teheran, M. de Hartwig, who excuses himself, taking refuge behind a pretended want of understanding between the three departments of Russian influence, the diplomatic, the military, and that of the Privy Council. When

the post of Minister was entrusted to M. de Hartwig, it was understood that all power should be vested in him, but the emptiness of this assurance soon became apparent, for if M. Shapshal submitted to his authority, Colonel Liakoff by no means did the same. M. de Hartwig explains this refusal by the fact of Colonel Liakoff's not being his subordinate, but a dependent of the staff of the Caucasian Military District, for which reason he proposed insisting upon the Cossack officer's being placed under the direction of the Central Military Department. The explanation appears wanting in sufficiency, when it is considered that the said Caucasian Military District is dependent upon the Minister for War, and that it would have been an easy matter for M. de Hartwig to transmit his instructions through the channel of that Minister.

With regard to the *Majlis*, it has, unfortunately, not come up to the expectations which its foundation created. It has not restored peace to the country nor order to its finances; it has not even facilitated a foreign loan. Neither has it produced in the Government the man who could save Persia—the genius of Taghi Zada having, so far, gone no further than the raising of hopes unfulfilled as yet. Nor has it brought forth a constitutional Nadir Shah! Of all its high intentions nothing is left but a mass of ruins, beneath which are buried the books of the laws, and in which still resounds the echo of voluble speeches interspersed with poetic quotations. Blood has tinged the flowers of rhetoric, the roar of cannon has drowned the voices.

CHAPTER II

THE CITY OF TREES

THE town of Rasht, where we arrived this morning, comes upon the traveller arriving from the bleak table-lands of Iran with the shock of a surprise.

Buried in a forest of verdure, there is little about it that is characteristically Persian, beyond that appearance of dilapidation, carelessness and neglect, so pathetically picturesque, which is the key-note of every town in the Middle East. Here there are no stately terraces above the houses, which are red-roofed or thatched in the every-day fashion familiar to English eyes; no cupolas of glittering tiles shining out through a limpid atmosphere, no limpid atmosphere, but heavy airs, perpetual mists, which are scarcely to be dispelled by the most burning sun of summer, a penetrating moisture, laden with miasma from the rice fields and the surrounding marshes.

In spite of these and other drawbacks, however, the country of the marshes has its own share of beauty, and after the arid grandeur of the higher lands, the exuberant fertility of the shores of the Caspian Sea exercises a fascination peculiar to itself. Nowhere do trees dominate the landscape with greater majesty and in more regal manner. It is a veritable Virgin Forest, with its wonderful tropical vegetation; its creepers interlacing from one hoary monarch to another in a delicate tracery of green, its rustling cascades lost among clumps of giant fern, and its exotic fauna, ranging from the ferocious tiger, leopard, or lynx to the inoffensive porcupine.

The vegetation forces its way into the very heart of the city—itself a great garden. All along the streets are groups of trees, with rivulets flowing at their feet, and the greatest marvel of all, green lawns, which, if they are innocent of the mowing machine and the roller, have at least the distinction of being the only ones in Persia.

And this rustic city still retains that commercial importance through which she became, in the seventeenth century, under Shah Abbas the Great, the capital of Ghilan. Through her geographical position, close to the Caspian Sea, she is the natural wharf for all that vast merchandise of Russia which the caravans eventually disperse throughout the whole of Northern Persia, and she is, moreover, the great market for the silk produced so abundantly in the district, and which forms the staple attraction of her bazar.

After we had lunched in the little hotel, whose French proprietor augments his revenues by the shooting of egrets and other water-fowl of rare plumage in demand amongst the *modistes* of Europe, we repaired to that bazar, Madame Chabret having still a few last purchases to make of Persian curios, and spent our time chiefly among the booths of the dealers in *Gulduzi*, the speciality of Rasht.

There men with the delicate fingers of women are engaged in embroidering all day long under the indifferent eyes of the busy passers-by; and beneath their skilful touch, unrivalled even by that of their sisters of the harem, exquisite silken flowers of every hue blossom out upon the vivid-coloured cloths.

But all this is no longer the East; it is but a pale imitation of the Far East, disenchanting my travelling companion, without recalling the charm of the country of Madame Chrysanthème, where she had spent the first years of her married life.

The population of Rasht, through the "civilising"

contact of Europe, has already lost in dignity of appearance, and this not only because of the heterogeneous character of their costumes, but because also those who wear them are losing that charming affability of Persian manners—when they do not lose their equilibrium or their reason through contact with the alcohol of the West.

We did not care to linger in this town, which possesses neither palace nor mosque worthy of interest. It has been disturbed, moreover, by the revolutionary storm, and has not yet recovered from the alarm caused by the arrival of a Russian man-o'-war, whose captain had intimated that if the *anjuman* was not closed forthwith he would come himself and close it.

After a brief visit to Zahir-ud-Dowla, the most delightful of Governors, and a staunch Constitutionalist to boot, we pushed on to Enzeli, the port of Rasht.

Port is merely a figure of speech, for only fishing-boats and vessels of low draft can enter the lagoon Murd-Ab (Dead Water), connected with the sea by a natural canal of little depth, which serves as harbour to the province. In truth, it is a singular fact that Persia, which possesses an Admiral chosen from among the subjects of a great European maritime Power, does not possess a single real port, and has for navy but two yachts, acting as men-o'-war, the one undergoing repairs in the Persian Gulf, and the other confined to the Murd-Ab by the Treaty of Turkmanchai, which does not permit any boat to fly the Persian flag in the waters of the Caspian Sea.

We made our way from Rasht to Enzeli, therefore, in a rowing boat, manned by twelve oarsmen, clad in a costume of pyjama-like simplicity, their heads and necks bare to the sun. Their rhythmic strokes were punctuated by invocations of Ali and Mahomet ; and as we crossed the Murd-Ab, in and out among the reed-covered islets, their cries put to flight flocks of herons, cormorants, and egrets

—those unfortunate birds whom even the Persian hunts for the sake of the head-gear of Western ladies.

At last we landed on the other side of the lagoon, at the village of Enzeli, nestled among its clustering trees, pomegranate and orange, in full flower. The setting sun tinged with crimson the Caspian Sea, and lit up like a fairy palace the rose and blue tiles of the tower-shaped kiosk raised by the magic wand of the Shahin-Shah upon the sea-shore; and we wandered through gardens of lilies and roses, and under the orange trees on the beach, thrilled by all this beauty.

Deeply moved, I gazed for the last time towards the south, to the mountain-tops, still flushed with the sun, and the remembrance of the first romance of my life made my heart swell and my pulses throb. Up there, on the table-lands of Iran, I had lived some intense hours, intoxicated by the perfume of the Rose, then torn by the thorns—and I was departing thence, wounded and sorrowful.

On the scented stillness, as the silver moon rose slowly over the sea, a fisherman's song came softly up through the night:

> Thine eyes look into mine, but thy heart is elsewhere!
> What do I care where thy heart may be?
> For I am a bird on the wing,
> Nor lack I branches whereon I may rest!

Was it a page of Saadi that opened for me *en Astakara?*

CHAPTER III

THE CITY OF CARPETS

WHEN our boat stopped at Astara, I took my leave of Madame Chabret, not without a good deal of regret. How gladly would I have returned with her to France, there to find, amid the affection of my own people, consolation for all my unhappiness! But it was not to be; my lot still lay among the ruins of Persian decrepitude, and I turned my steps towards Ardebil.

This city was easily reached, I found, by the Russian road; the difficulty lay in getting away from it again. The Russian Vice-Consul shook his head over my intention of pushing on to Tabriz, and informed me that the roads were all infested by the tribes of the Shah-saven, who had quite recently sacked a portion of the town, plundering and killing all who came in their way. They were now occupied in pillaging the neighbouring villages, and threatened to return to Ardebil at any moment. And, besides this, the Royalist troops, besieging Tabriz, would certainly not allow me to pass their lines, he assured me, and the component parts of these were at least as dangerous as the native marauders—those tribes from whose ranks the Cossacks were recruited.

And, after all, there was no such pressing need for me to hurry on, and I decided to wait, for a few days at all events, in the hope of the neighbourhood becoming more settled. Ardebil or Tabriz were all the same to me—equally unknown, and equally far from those whom I

loved! As if to increase still further the isolation of my position, not only could I receive no letters, but also, either in consequence of the revolution or else through negligence, the telegraph was not working. From Kum I looked for no good news, for I felt, as the carriage of Bibi Mâh disappeared in the distance amid the caravan of the dead, that all was now at an end for ever, so far as that page of my life went, that I should never again try to read in the eyes of the beautiful Shiraz maiden the secret of her mysterious soul. But I had left good friends behind me in Teheran—Yvonne and Isfandiar and Vecquincourt.

Robinson Crusoe on his desert island could not have felt more desperately alone and lonely than did I in this ancient city, falling slowly to pieces beneath the accumulated weight of centuries.

Ardebil! In any other frame of mind the very sound of its name would have awakened in me feelings of interest.

After a couple of days I resolved to overcome my dejection, and to seek distraction in exploring the town that has given to Persia her most glorious dynasty, and to the South Kensington Museum in London its most glorious carpet.

I had not forgotten that within its now crumbling walls was cradled the great Safavi dynasty, whose founders, the Saint (Shaykh Safi) and the Warrior (Shah Ismail) rest there from their labours, side by side, in a magnificent mosque-tomb, known as "The House of Paradise," nor was I oblivious of the fact that beneath the shadow of its turquoise-blue cupolas came into being the Persian Schism.

In former times religion and commerce had united to bring prosperity to the town. And even now the very wreck of its hidden wealth offers an irresistible attraction to the robber tribes of the district, who have so lately

come down upon the town, defying the Persian garrison entrenched in the Ark, a quadrilateral fortress, surrounded by moats and double walls and corner bastions, constructed according to plans supplied by the French officers of Napoleon's Persian Mission under General Gardane.

Amid the ruins of a glorious past, eighty-four mosques still stand intact, but not one of them can compare with the "House of Paradise," rising royally in its dazzling mantle of faïence, yellow in ground, in a mysterious court, approached by dark and chilly passages.

I got so far without attracting any attention other than the idle gaze of a few loafers seated in the shade of the pear trees in the court, and, emboldened by my success, I approached the door of the sanctuary itself, and under cover of an interested scrutiny of the silver plates which adorn it, glanced furtively within. In Teheran even this much would not have failed to attract a crowd around me, full of menace and insult; what was my surprise, therefore, at seeing coming towards me, all affability and courtesy, a Persian in flowing robes and the green turban of the Sayyids, who greeted me with the Mussulman salaam and invited me to enter. He was one of the guardians of the tombs.

Delighted at such a rare opportunity of penetrating into a Persian mosque, I hastened to accept his offer, leaving my shoes at the threshold.

On entering the sanctuary, adorned with golden foliage on a background of blue, one might fancy oneself in a Christian chapel, with its galleries, its deep niches, and its silver railings at the back, such as those which screen off a chancel. In the semi-darkness the pale shimmer of sconces suspended from the roof lights up the bars of a golden gate. Through this is seen the sandal-wood coffin of the Shaykh Safi, in a round tower whose tiled sides

reflect a metallic gleam, and which is lighted by arched windows with gold-inlaid silver shutters.

A corridor leads to a second tower, equally exquisite in decoration, a second chamber in this Paradise of Death, where Shah Ismail sleeps his last sleep, between perfumed boards of sandal-wood, encrusted with ivory and turquoise arabesques, among which meander, like a stream of gold, gracious inscriptions from the Koran.

And in an enamelled recess, under the guardianship of the *Khuddam-bashi*, the descendant of these illustrious dead, are preserved the twenty-eight prayer carpets, the glory of the sanctuary of Ardebil, the most precious productions of the Persian artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Upon backgrounds of palest rose pink, of ivory white, or of sky blue, are depicted tangles of imaginary flowers, arrested by delicate lines or by columns supporting a pointed arch, from which hangs a quaint mosque lamp. The centre of the carpet is almost always plain, though occasionally ornamented with a vase of flowers, with birds perching on its margin. At the top, the spot whereon the Mussulman rests his forehead while praying, is woven either the Shiite profession of faith, " There is no God but Allah, Mahomet is His Prophet, and Ali is His Vali "—or this maxim : " Make haste to pray while there is yet time "—or else the Verse of the Throne : " Allah ! there is no God beside Him, the living God, existing of Himself, Who never slumbers or sleeps."

Further on, in the Cheeni Khana, are spread out on the ground the treasure of porcelain dishes, plates and bowls, Chinese and Persian vessels, used once upon a time for the meals of the pilgrims, distributed to them at the Shah's expense. Every vessel bears the mark of the sovereign by whom it was presented to the tomb of his ancestors. These royal emblems are full of humility—

"Shah Abbas, the Slave of Ali"; or "Shah Sefi, the Dog of the Threshold of Ali."

Here, too, is the chamber, now empty, which once contained the library of richly illuminated Persian and Arabian manuscripts which General Paskievitch carried off to St. Petersburg at the close of the war with Russia.

The Kajar Shahs have done so much to destroy the prestige of this sanctuary of a dynasty, whose very remembrance puts their own to shame, that even religious feeling would, doubtless, not be strong enough to stay the hand of sacrilege if the Shah-saven tribes really took possession of the town—did not the Wahabites, indeed, pillage the very tomb of Mahomet? And we may well fear that in such a case the gold and jewels would be stolen, these faïences and rare porcelains be broken, and these priceless carpets cut up and divided amongst the soldiery, the fate, last year, of those carpets upon which sat the delegates to the first Persian Parliament.

CHAPTER IV

AT TABRIZ

THE reports I had heard at Ardebil as to the state of the Tabriz route were not in the least exaggerated, and I discovered, at the risk of my life, that it was distinctly rash to try and reach the latter city. When I got within two miles of it, at a turn of the road—or rather of the track worn by the passage of centuries of caravans—a volley of rifle shots, fired from behind the rocks to one side, riddled my conveyance with bullets. The horses took fright and reared, and then one of them fell to the ground mortally wounded. But by some miracle, enough to make one believe in that predestination so dear to the Persian mind, none of us were injured otherwise.

The driver having called out something in Azari-Turkish, the language of the country, heads began to appear from behind the rocks, and a parley ensued. Our savage aggressors, ragged in dress and wearing huge fur caps on their heads, were not in the least impressed by my titles, and refused to allow us to continue on our way. The only concession that I could obtain from them was that they would conduct me to their chief.

My servant remained with the driver to guard the carriage, and, surrounded like a prisoner, I proceeded towards a group of tents erected on a hill near by.

What was my surprise when in the expected brigand chieftain I recognised young Murtaza Khan, a nephew of Mulla Ibrahim. These, then, were no robber bands, but the Imperial troops!

REFUGEES CROWDING TO THE BRITISH CONSULATE AT TABRIZ

(FROM "MULLA NASIR-UD-DIN")

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The Khan treated me with all those honours which Persian politeness delights in lavishing upon even the least considerable member of the *Corps Diplomatique*, pushing his courtesy so far as to present me with a fresh horse in place of the one his men had killed, and provide me with an escort on to Tabriz, to prevent any fresh assault on the part of his troops, more prone to plunder inoffensive travellers and to hold up the mails than to attack the Nationalist forces.

When we got within firing distance of the Nationalist defenders of Tabriz my escort took leave of me, galloping hastily away. Then, unwilling to tempt fortune a second time, I stopped the carriage, and hoisting a white handkerchief on the end of my stick, awaited results. After a quarter of an hour or so, as nothing happened, and no one seemed to be coming, I told the man to drive on slowly. We crawled along at a foot's pace, until at length we found ourselves covered by the sentries of an outpost, with whom we began to parley. The revolutionaries showed themselves far better disciplined than the Imperial troops, and we entered the town at last without any difficulty.

First came ruins, nothing but ruins, unimposing and uninteresting witnesses of the terrible earthquake which, a hundred years ago, brought upon Tabriz the fate of Messina. Then followed interminable stretches of arid, leafless cemeteries, after which we came upon a small bazar, its empty booths enclosed in broken and decaying planks. And, all of a sudden, emerging from the shadow of this desolation, I was dazzled by the sight of an immense ogive arch, of a deep and glorious blue, the remains of a mosque built four centuries ago by the last Shah of the Black Sheep dynasty, and at this moment used by the Nationalists under the command of the popular Sattar Khan for the purposes of an entrenchment.

Turning away from this feast of colour, we plunged into the monotone of one and then of another narrow street, just wide enough for our carriage to get through, whose clay-built walls, rising ever higher and higher on either side of us as we drew into the heart of the town, were all most dismal-looking, whether protecting the dwellings of the poor or of the rich. The wealthier inhabitants are more anxious to conceal than to parade their better fortune, fearing to provoke, on the one hand, the rapacity of the Government, and on the other the hatred of the starving populace. A sense of depression overcame me in these ruined thoroughfares, so full of gloom and mystery.

Then came another bazar, open this time, blocked by a flock of small donkeys laden with bricks for the construction of barricades. On either side wretched-looking booths displayed their various wares, with here and there the dry and unappetising provisions of a beleaguered town. A carpet-seller, forgetful of the dangers of the situation, had, through habit, spread out in the middle of the road a few rugs of too brilliant a hue, in order that the feet of the passers-by trampling upon them might give to them that appearance of age which so enhances their value.

We pushed our way through the confusion, and arrived at last at the French Consulate. Behind the house, looming against the sky, stands the huge Ark, the fort, which is one of the few buildings, except the arch of the Blue Mosque famous for its tiles, which have resisted and survived the earthquakes and the invasion of Tamerlane.

And this was my first glimpse of Tabriz, that town once so glorious as to be called the Pinnacle of Islam, the House of Sovereignty—*Dar-us-Saltana.*

. . . . .

What mournful days have I spent here in this beleaguered town, with the constant prospect before me of famine, or death by ball or shell! I have at last grown used to the frugal diet imposed by uncertainty as to the morrow, and to the continual roar of cannons, but not to the loneliness and the deprivation of news.

The arrival of posts is a pure matter of chance, and when they do come, the information they bring is far from cheering. I have heard once only from Kum—a solitary letter, the last, no doubt, dictated by Nur Jehan to Mansur.

It tells me that Bibi Mâh has taken sanctuary in the mosque, and has written to Baghir Khan to ask his forgiveness; that she prays all day long, with fasting and penance, to purify herself—to purify herself!

My presentiments were not mistaken. The end has indeed come.

The perusal of this letter affected me less than I should have imagined possible; impressing me merely with that melancholy inherent in all things that fade and pass away and die. And when I wrote of it to Yvonne, my words were as dry as my heart; it was as if I were telling the story of something to which I was a stranger, or, rather, relating a dream.

My heart is no longer aching, but I still have a tender remembrance of Bibi Mâh—Bibi Mâh of the soft, languorous glances, upon the terrace; Bibi Mâh convalescent, lying out in the sunshine of a spring morning.

My news from Isfandiar, also, is partly distressing. Having failed to take refuge in the British Legation, like Taghi Zada and a score of other Constitutionalists, and having failed also in reaching the French Legation, he had fled by night, and rejoining Zarin Taj, had gone with her into hiding in a village on the road south. From there, going straight on, they had reached Ispahan,

where the Bakhtiyaris had given them hospitality, and from there he had written to me, on the eve of his return to his own country. In this letter he laid aside his usual discreet reticence, and spoke of his wife with enthusiasm; she had been a great moral support to him in his trials, and the fact that she had not hesitated to follow him into danger when her father, once again powerful, would gladly have welcomed and protected her, touched him greatly. The mention of Baghir Khan led him to speak of Bahadur, who has become the real Shah of Persia, arrogating to himself the title of Sipah-Salar—Commander-in-Chief—and has prevented Mohammed Ali from yielding to Anglo-Russian pressure in the matter of the recall of the *Majlis*. He seems to be profiting by his absolute power to enrich himself by every kind of robbery.

The score or so of Constitutionalists who had fled to the British Legation at the time of Isfandiar's escape were for the most part exiled, Taghi Zada at their head, for eighteen months; and two were strangled.

He concluded his letter with this prophetic sentence, whose mysterious meaning I had no difficulty in interpreting:

"The mountain dwellers will descend into the plain and will rebuild the edifice."

No news from Mirza Jafar!

My French correspondence is not exactly exhilarating in tone, either; my mother, although she tries to conceal it, is evidently most uneasy at the thought of my being here, and her powerlessness to help me troubles her greatly. And the same note of anxiety pervades the letters in which Yvonne expresses her sisterly love and devotion.

CHAPTER V

SATTAR KHAN, THE GARIBALDI OF PERSIA

AMONG those men whom the Persian revolution has brought to the front, no figure is more prominent than that of Sattar Khan, so strong, even to-day, is the hold that military heroism has upon the imagination. He is another Garibaldi—a Garibaldi with the mysterious and picturesque fascination of an Oriental hero.

Foremost among his natural gifts must be reckoned his fierce and virile beauty, surely one of the chief qualifications necessary in a leader of primitive men. Without being of undue stature, he yet towers above the crowd by means of his majestic bearing and personal magnetism. His regular features, his face, alive with energy, his piercing eyes, "looking into the very heart," his sensual yet authoritative mouth, beneath its heavy walrus-tusk moustache, his sturdy neck, like some temple column, are his only insignia of command. No braid, no stars distinguish him from his fellow-soldiers. He wears the simple garb of a Caucasian warrior, enhanced only by the double row of cartridges which cross upon his breast. And the crimson marks upon his finger-tips are not the stains of blood, but the more peaceful dye of henna-juice, for the hardships of a revolutionist's life have not led him to neglect this essential of a Persian toilette.

His military talents are said to have been fostered in the school of brigandage—a practical school indeed—for

Sattar Khan spent his youth in the Karajadagh, where brigandage is the order of the day and a state of petty warfare continual. Of humble origin, he was more or less a servant, according to the Persian acceptance of the term—that is to say, *à la suite*—in the shadow of some powerful master, who rewarded his services not with money, but with authority to pay himself from among the humbler crowd.

Some go so far as to name as his former master Rahim Khan, that brigand chief whom the Shah released from prison to set at the head of the Reactionary bands attacking Tabriz and pillaging Azarbayjan, under the pretext of restoring order and the rule of Mohammed Ali. However this may be, he was, from the outset of the Liberal movement, among the *Fidais*, those who devoted themselves to Liberty, or, rather, to the Constitution, amongst whom his growing influence and his intelligence made him remarkable. He soon became the leader of his quarter.

Did he know then, it might be asked, anything about this Constitution for which he had pledged himself to shed his blood? Did he know the nature of the *Majlis* and the Parliamentary *régime?* It is probable that all this meant little more to him than to the great majority of the Persian population, that is little beyond more justice, less taxation and exactions, and the overthrow of his former profession.

When the people of Tabriz sent a body of troops to Teheran to "save the Constitution," Sattar was chosen as commander, and he was given as lieutenant a friend of his, a working mason of warlike instincts, who is now the second in command of the revolutionary forces. But scarcely had they gone two days' march from the town when they had to retrace their steps, for irregular troops in the pay of the Shah began invading Tabriz. The

SATTAR KHAN

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Tabrizi, terrorised by the spread of the Reactionary forces, contemplated surrender, each house displaying the white flag of submission. This furnished Sattar with the opportunity for a splendid act of heroism. With a handful of men, he went from house to house, hauling down the white flags and trampling them under foot, shaming the poltroons who would have yielded without striking a blow. " We must defend the Constitution with our last breath ! " he cried, and his enthusiasm gave courage to the waverers, and enlarged miraculously his band of followers.

This band was composed of three very different elements. First there were the pure Constitutionalists, the " Young Persians," the true *Fidais*, fanatically devoted to the idea of Progress, Union, and Liberty ; secondly, the general populace, whose dream it was to possess and handle a rifle, the remains of the sanguinary Asiatic hordes which accompanied Timur ; and thirdly, the merchants whom these disturbances were ruining, and who had no definite political idea beyond hatred for the person of the Shah. These last desired peace and the resumption of normal life and business ; but they found themselves between the hammer and the anvil, between the horsemen of Rahim Khan, plundering and slaying, and the followers of Sattar, with their *commission de secours*, which, in exchange for receipts redeemable after the crisis, demanded or exacted important sums for Liberty. Of the two evils they chose that which appeared to them the least, and it was thus, with these three elements, that quarter by quarter, barricade after barricade, Tabriz was conquered for the cause of the revolution.

Some time later the town was invested by the Imperial troops, upon whom Sattar Khan inflicted several defeats without altogether repulsing them, and little by little came famine, the cause of the present disasters. The

spell of the genius of the revolutionary leader on the one side, and on the other the fear of the massacre which could not fail to follow capitulation, helped to maintain courage to the resisting point.

The *Anjuman*—the Constitutional Club—has erected itself into a Parliament, and Tabriz, in her distress, feeds upon illusions for lack of bread. The *Anjuman* dreams of the overthrow of the Kajar dynasty and the establishment of a Republic. Some among them are in favour of a Federative Republic—Mussulman United States of Persia; others, while subscribing to purely Republican doctrines, believe that a Sultan is necessary to the order of the social body. And the air is thick with proclamations, predictions, and speeches; one points out that in almost every dynasty of Islam the sixth monarch has been dethroned—witness the Sultan Abdul-Aziz of Morocco, who was the sixth Caliph of his dynasty, as Mohammed Ali is the sixth Shah of the Kajar family. Another proclaims that "we must imitate the Ottomans, and make ourselves masters of what we have begun to conquer, for a new era opens before us. But if we do not succeed, we and all our followers must assemble in the Turkish Consulate, and become Ottoman subjects, for the Ottoman Government is at once Mussulman and Constitutional."

Among these floods of thought and speech Sattar Khan keeps strictly to the point—"to defend the Constitution with our last breath"—and nothing can abate his courage, which he pushes to stoicism, going so far as to conceal, on a recent occasion, serious wounds until he was assured in himself that they were not mortal—lest the moral effect of their leader's danger should prove disastrous upon his men.

His magnanimity is equal to his courage. Several times he has, at the risk of his own life, spared a defence-

less enemy, as when, having put to flight Samad Khan and his men, he intervened to save three prisoners whom the Constitutionalists were preparing to slaughter, according to the rules of Eastern warfare. It was no light matter, even for so popular a leader, to defraud of their prey the fanatics to whom vengeance was both a duty and a pleasure; but he did not stop to think of the danger to himself in following the dictates of a more humane conscience.

Upon the inevitable fall of Tabriz, if he is not killed in the fray, Sattar Khan will probably return to his mountains, and his innermost political ideas will remain a mystery, unless, indeed, we see him again, like Garibaldi, as a deputy upholding the banner of Liberty in the reconstructed *Majlis*. *Khuda midanad*—God knows!

CHAPTER VI

THE CITY OF FAMINE

April, 1909.

"IN the Name of Allah the Clement, the Merciful, we make known to all the Persian nation the Commandment of Allah.

"A strenuous effort to get rid of this sanguinary tyrant and thereby to save the lives, the honour, and the possessions of Mussulmans becomes to-day a most sacred duty, whereas the payment of taxes to his agents shall be accounted a most grievous sin. All endeavours to establish and strengthen the Constitution shall be equal in merit to battles undertaken on behalf of the Imam Lord of Time (may our souls be his sacrifice !), while the least opposition thereto, or the smallest support given to its oppressors is equivalent to a desertion of his cause, and to the waging of war against him (may the blessing and the peace of Allah be upon him !). May the Merciful preserve all true believers from so doing, if He so will ! "

Such is the injunction issued by the heads of the Persian clergy. They have, moreover, declared Mohammed Ali Shah and his followers to be Infidels, against whom it is the duty of every pious Mussulman to wage the holy war, a step which does not make these excommunicated evil-doers sleep the less peacefully in their palaces, or prevent them from sending forces against Tabriz.

The situation here is really desperate. If Russia does not send troops to the assistance of the besieged, those

whom the famine has spared will undoubtedly fall beneath the swords of the Royalists.

In the streets the scenes are heartrending; thousands of women and children are crying for bread, with threats or entreaties. These women of Tabriz have already, on more than one occasion, been driven to deeds of violence in their despair. Hajji Kasam Agha, the former deputy of Ardebil, was their first victim. He was president of a committee for ensuring bread to the people, and one morning, on his way to the *Anjuman*, he was challenged by a body of women and accused of being a corn-forestaller. He replied with an oath, and they fell upon him furiously, when his servant coming up with a revolver, enabled him to get away and take refuge in the telegraph office, where he concealed himself in a cupboard. The women pursued him thither, and having at last found him, they attacked him savagely with the iron heels of their shoes, tearing out his beard and gouging out his eyes. Some men having come to their assistance in this tragic work, he was finished off with their daggers, after which, having denuded him of his clothing, they hung him up by his feet from a building in the Artillery Square.

As public vengeance is frequently blind and unjust, we may expect, after such a precedent, even worse things from a populace maddened by hunger. It is we, the representatives of European States, who are now threatened with their reprisals. What an awful thing, to end thus, head downwards, arms swinging, like those victims of Mulla Ibrahim on the Square of Exercise!

May.

The Russians have come: we are saved! Communications are again open, and one feels once more in touch with the world.

Among the numerous letters which arrived for me by the last mail there were three which were calculated to

excite in me conflicting emotions. The first, from Yvonne, announces laconically the death of her husband. In the second, Mansur tells me that Baghir, in reply to Bibi Mâh's appeal, has promised her forgiveness on condition that she never reveals the secret of her escapade to anyone, and that she consents to marry Mulla Ibrahim. Bibi Mâh will have nothing to say to such a marriage, and so she is remaining on in sanctuary. She has sold her jewels and is living the modest life of a refugee, refusing the services of Nur Jehan, and Mansur, who asks me what they are to do under these circumstances.

The third letter is from Isfandiar, hopeful and radiant. The Bakhtiyaris have captured Ispahan and are about to march upon Teheran, to restore the Constitution. He himself is in command of a company, and Sardar Assad is at the head of the troops, which are augmented daily by fresh contingents.

And the Nationalists of Rasht and their chief, the Sipahdar, are also talking of marching on Teheran, announcing their further intention of deposing Mohammed Ali.

But here it is greatly feared that Russia will protect the Shah.

For my own part, I fling myself heartily into the optimism of Isfandiar. It is good to see dawn breaking again, rosy with promise. Next month the Consul will be back at his post and I shall be able to leave.

CHAPTER VII

NEW DAWN

TEHERAN, *July*, 1909.

I RETURNED from Tabriz by the overland route. It was lengthy, difficult, and dangerous, and the excessive heat and the hardships of the way were more formidable enemies than the brigands let loose by the anarchy into which the misgovernment of Mohammed Ali had plunged Persia.

With what joy I quitted the town, with what joy I blotted out from my life the nightmare through which I had lived! Up to the last, sorrow seemed to dog my footsteps there. First I learnt of the death of my good Mirza Jafar. And what a death! He had been that determined individual who, in the minaret of the mosque of Sipah-Salar, at the time of the *coup d'état* of June, had preferred to die by thirst in the sun, after four days of horrible sufferings, rather than surrender to the victorious Reactionaries. Poor Mirza! And when I was full of the excitement of departure, the mail brought me a last echo of my unhappy adventure, in the shape of a letter from Mansur. He informed me of the sudden disappearance of Bibi Mâh. One morning Nur Jehan had not found her in the cell where she lived in *bast* in the Mosque of Kum, and, after much anxiety and searching, they had learnt that she had been sent for from Teheran. She had allowed herself to be taken away, without resistance and mysteriously. Mansur made no comment, but announced his return.

I never once looked back as I departed.

During the course of my journey my mind was preoccupied with different ideas and new hopes, which had not for their sole object the Persian political crisis. I travelled straight through whenever possible, and I cursed all the circumstances, only too numerous, alas! that delayed my progress.

All along the way everyone was engrossed with the revolution. Conflicting rumours met me at every stage; one day it was the Nationalists who were on the point of seizing the power and putting an end to the Kajar dynasty; another time it was Mohammed Ali who had cut to pieces his enemies, with the help of the Russians—armies of Muscovites had invaded the Caspian provinces. At Kasvin I found more exact information. The Nationalist forces raised at Rasht, under the command of the Sipahdar, had passed through the town a few days previously, on their way to Teheran, where they were to join with the Bakhtiyaris of the Sardar Assad in attempting an attack upon the Royalist forces. As for the Russians, they had landed about two thousand men at Enzeli and were approaching Kasvin by forced marches.

I scarcely stopped to rest; but it was so late when I reached Kharaj, the last stage before Teheran, and the horses were so tired, that I was obliged to stay there for the night. An engagement had taken place there on Friday, the 9th, between the troops of the Sipahdar and the Cossacks of Liakoff, an engagement of uncertain issue, and with no great display of valour on either side. A few killed and a few wounded of both parties, and the Cossacks had retreated in good order. Other battles had occurred the previous evening, and that very day, some miles south; I could still hear a few solitary shots of artillery in the distance. The Bakhtiyaris, it was said, had defeated the Royalist troops. My informants im-

puted the advantage to one force or the other according to their own political views.

The following day, Tuesday, July 13th, I got up at daybreak and set off in great haste. The plain was deserted; those inhabitants of the villages who had not joined the troops had taken refuge in their houses or at Teheran, and there were, of course, no caravans or travellers to be seen.

As I passed close to the tea-house where, nearly three years previously, I had waited with the French Colony to meet Mme Chabret, I stopped to water the horses at the stream. The garden where I had met Yvonne for the first time, and where I had found Isfandiar again, no longer wore its former inviting aspect. Its gate was fast shut, and trunks of trees lay across the willow-bordered alley that led to it.

Instead of following the direct road to Teheran, I turned to the left, towards the north, for it was to Zarganda that I intended to go in the first instance, to place myself at the disposition of the Minister, and above all, I must frankly confess, to see Yvonne again as soon as possible. The sky was turning rose in the East, and the sun, still invisible, fringed with gold the few thin and elongated clouds, stray oases in the desert of the firmament. Some belated bats were flitting towards their dark retreats, whilst the birds greeted with joyous twitterings the dawning day. The East was once more about to spread before me its illusory promises, and I felt myself still and always ready to accept them. In the magic of its enchanting scene Persia had helped me to many disillusions, many sorrows, but she had also discovered to me the most exquisite of my countrywomen, that twin soul sought in vain in my own land. Persia had taught me to know the joys and the sorrows of a deceptive passion, she had also shown me the enthralling charm of

an *amitié-amoureuse*, which had grown and grown, and which I felt expanding within my heart. Amidst all the mirages that haunted my Asiatic path this was the sole reality.

" Bagh-i-Shah," said my servant, as we passed by the Garden to which Mohammed Ali had retired the year before to prepare his second *coup d'état*. It was deserted, for His Majesty was now in one of his palaces at the foot of the Elbruz mountains. We rounded it, and were skirting the ramparts, when we saw a posse of horsemen galloping in our direction. Not having forgotten the lesson of Tabriz, I stopped cautiously and awaited their approach. They were some of the Sipahdar's men. They saluted me respectfully, and requested me politely, but without giving me any choice, to follow them. They replied vaguely to my questions, but added that I should know all about it in a few moments.

We were now passing the north side of the ramparts of Teheran. I perceived at the Ashrat-Abad Gate a body of troops entering the town, without a shot being fired. What was the meaning of all this ?

As we drew nearer I recognised these men as Bakhtiyaris, and amongst them was Isfandiar. I requested to be taken to him. It was not the moment for effusions. He appeared very mysterious and extremely preoccupied. He assigned me an escort, saying, " It would be more prudent for you to come with us." And the body of troops which he commanded set off at a gallop towards the Shimran Gate.

On our arrival there the guard received us with a volley of rifle shots. One of our men was killed, and several were wounded ; but in a twinkling one section had dismounted, and those of the guard who were not killed surrendered. The gate was opened, and the Bakhtiyaris entered the town without further hindrance.

It was surprising to see these savage tribesmen conquer thus peaceably a city whose wealth might well excite their cupidity. I no longer recognised my Asia. What was the divinity that had thus transformed these fierce warriors ?

The Baharistan and the Mosque of Sipah-Salar were already in the occupation of the Nationalists. The Sardar Assad and the Sipahdar were installed there as pacific conquerors, and had set up the standard of Liberty and the Constitution.

. . . . .

Yvonne was writing under the colonnade of her summer residence, when I came into her Garden. She grew pale at the sight of me ; and I was as deeply moved. I pressed her hand warmly ; I do not know what feeling prevented my kissing it as I had been accustomed to do. She was a widow now—a widow ! Was that the reason why we were so embarrassed, and why we found nothing to say ?

She made me sit down in an arm-chair beside her and questioned me about my journey, and, by degrees, the conversation warmed and our embarrassment disappeared. She told me of her uneasiness during the siege of Tabriz, the anxiety with which she awaited news of me, sending to enquire of Vecquincourt when the mail brought nothing for her. My emotion increased before these proofs of a deep affection, and, as she spoke, a sensation I had never felt before, calm, healthy, beneficent, filled my breast, like the pure and balmy air of our beautiful Normandy on a May morning.

I felt myself happy in simple fashion, and if my heart-beats quickened, it was not with those irregular pulsations, that breathlessness which I had experienced at the time of a miserable passion. Was it really love—true love—that opened before me its limpid horizons, and

had I been so long blind and unconscious of my own sentiments?

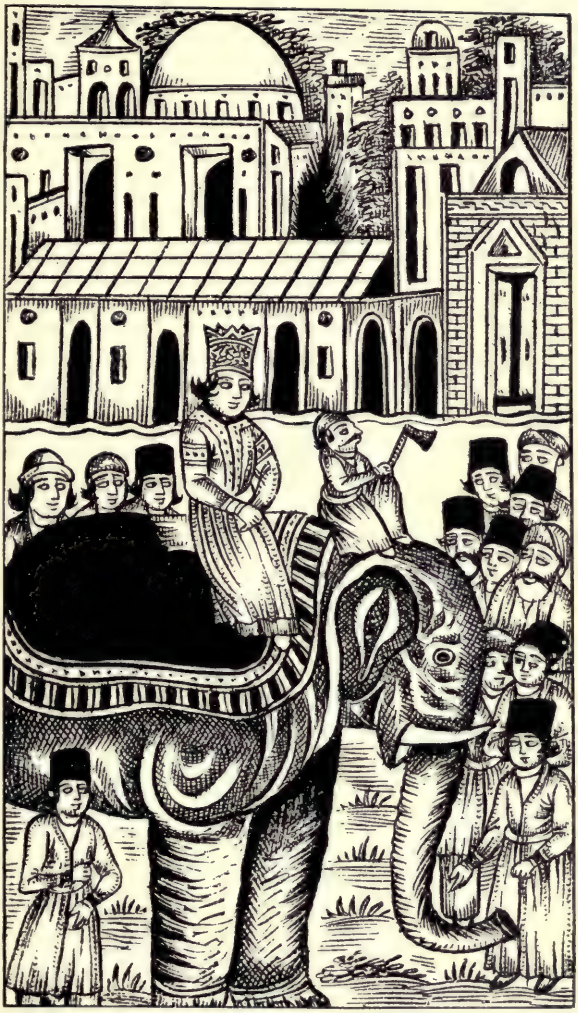
Certainly, looking back into the past with eyes now open, I realised that it was she—Yvonne—whom I had loved from the beginning, without knowing it—that I had loved her at first sight. I had fallen under her charm with the first words she spoke to me. It was she who had not ceased to fill my heart whilst, in my ignorance, I sought intoxication in the cup of impossible loves. And it was her widow's weeds, after this long separation filled with the unacknowledged thought of her, that caused me to see clearly into my own heart. Above all it was that faithful friendship which her emotion and her words revealed to me.

I could not express all this flood of thoughts. Nevertheless, they burnt my lips; but it was so delightful to me to hear her speak, and she was so beautiful to look on, that I remained speechless in my happiness.

She was recalling now the memories of the past year. When she got to that spring afternoon which we had spent in my Garden at Zarganda, with Isfandiar and Harun, my eyes clouded. She saw it, and that, doubtless, brought to her mind a thought identical with my own. She was silent. Our eyes met.

"Do you remember, Yvonne," I said, "our conversation that day? I have often thought of it since. What a fool I was then, with my confused philosophies, my wild imaginations, my intellectual polygamy! And to think that it should have taken me all this time to find out that I was merely spreading snares to deceive myself—all this time to realise the fact that my love was single in its duality, and that it was you alone that I loved, Yvonne!"

. . . . .



THE BOY SHAH IN PROCESSION—AS THE PERSIAN NEWSPAPERS SAW IT

(FROM A NATIVE PRINT)

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July 20th.

Everywhere there is joy and triumph !

The dawn is as rosy for Persia as it is for me : the good-looking young Sultan Ahmad has been proclaimed Shah, with Azud-ul-Mulk as Regent, and this morning he was received with acclamation by the people on his solemn entry into the town.

The era of Liberty and of Reforms has certainly set in. It is Isfandiar who asserts this, and I *will* believe it this time, in spite of all the gloomy prognostications of Vecquincourt, whose sombre pessimism the developments of the last crisis have not succeeded in shaking.

The Enchantress Liberty is the divinity of the hour, and we live in a fairy tale ; the good Genii have received their reward, Isfandiar is a General *pour de bon*, and the Bakhtiyaris have forgotten their native ferocity and lawlessness ; Prince Harun-ar-Rashid has been made Governor of a Province; the Constitutionalists have obtained their Constitution, and the Sardar Assad and the Sipahdar are Cabinet Ministers—no more Viziers. As for the bad Genii—they have received their punishment—the deposed Mohammed Ali has taken refuge in the Russian Legation, with the Amir Bahadur Jang and other eminent members of the "Gulistan *Anjuman*," whilst awaiting exile. The Cossacks of Liakoff have been beaten and forced to surrender. They have, however, chosen the wiser course of going over to the victors. Baghir Khan has followed their example, and there is no more convinced Constitutionalist than he is. He remains the Magnificence - of - the - Royal - Intimacy — of the new King !

As for Mulla Ibrahim, the Enchantress Liberty has judged him unfit to live beneath her sky, and he has been hanged, in company with his brother in reaction, the Shaykh Fazl-Ullah. His death has cleared the prospects

of a pretty Phantom Lady in the mystery of her harem. . . .

Yes, all this seems like the last act of a fairy play ; but whichever is right, Vecquincourt or Isfandiar, everything is none the less *couleur de rose* to-day for Persia as for myself.

And how good it is to watch the dawn break, rosy with promise !

THE END

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